

## **One Journal : Two Voices**

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## Introduction

The complexity of learning to teach is acknowledged in the literature (Britzman, 1991, Zeichner, 1992, 1993) and the worldwide attention to restructuring teacher education (Campbell-Evans, 1993) has focussed upon the challenge of providing a program which develops reflective practitioners capable of critically inquiring into their own practice (Clandinin, Davies, Hogan & Kennard, 1993; Knowles, 1991; Martin, 1991; Zeichner, 1992, 1993). The literature on teacher education describes two significant trends which impact on the importance of the practicum as a key component in learning to teach. The first focuses on field experience as a site for integrating theory and practice, and the second emphasises reflection as a process for examining behaviour and motives.

Journal writing is one way of encouraging student teachers to examine, critique and evaluate their own development. The use of journals as a tool for reflective practice is increasingly present in teacher education programs. Holly (1984, p. 5) suggests that a journal "is not merely a flow of impressions, it is impressions plus descriptions of the circumstances, others, the self, motives, thoughts, and feelings." Keeping a journal is commended as a method of viewing one's own practice through analysing, evaluating and defining new challenges for future action. In addition, journal writing provides a vehicle for documenting and exploring the experiences of student teachers as they learn to teach.

The journal becomes a valuable tool when it is interactive, that is, an ongoing written dialogue between the teacher educator (either university teacher and/or classroom teacher) and the student teacher (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). An interactive journal provides opportunities for student teachers to make practical theory explicit and for teacher educators to engage with them as learners (Francis, 1995). Thus, interactive journals have the potential to allow student teachers and university teachers to work closely together within a supportive context which is unlike the traditional teaching and supervision models.

Students value the availability of another person's thinking. In journals, the feedback provides affirmation of feelings and thinking, and initiates a higher level of commitment to the journaling task (Roe & Stallman, 1994). It is generally reported that the interactive journal provides a voice for the student teacher to share thoughts and raise questions with an interested party. In addition, responding on an individual level enables personalised feedback centred on specific concerns of student teachers. When dialogue occurs between the teacher educator and the student teacher there is potential for a particular form of mentorship to be established (McFarland, 1992).

Teacher comments in reflective dialogue journals have been categorised as: affirming comments; nudging comments; giving information; and personal connection comments (Krol, 1996). Krol suggests that the use

of these types of comments varies with the needs and purposes of the journal writers, and that the response encourages dialogue. Many students see journals as a safe environment in which to explore and test their thinking.

Although journal writing has been lauded as an effective pedagogical strategy in teacher education programs, some recent research has highlighted concerns with its use (Anderson, 1992; Hoover, 1994;

McFarland, 1992). Problems associated with journal writing centre on its overuse, lack of focus, emphasis on grading, level of skill in writing, and lack of student's understanding of 'reflection'. In light of the increased popularity of journal writing in teacher education programs, further research evidence is required to substantiate the effectiveness of journal writing as a process for inquiry. The purpose of this study was to:

examine the process of interactive journal writing between student teachers and university teachers as a means of encouraging reflective practice;

identify the strategies university teachers use as journal respondents which contribute to students' learning about teaching.

We were interested in identifying the strategies we used as journal respondents that contributed to students' learning about teaching

within the context of an extended field experience.

## Method

The research proceeded in two phases. In phase one, data were drawn from six interactive journals written by students and university teachers who participated in a school-based alternative teacher education program which we have described elsewhere (Campbell-Evans & Maloney, 1995, 1996, 1997). Keeping a reflective journal was a requirement of this program.

The students used the journals as a medium for recording and reflecting upon their school experience. The journals were an integral part of the practicum and document the 'conversations' we had with students as their university teachers. The journals enabled us to revisit school experiences as a way of gaining an understanding of students' professional growth; of understanding how journals were used; and how we as university teachers and researchers became part of that process. In this phase of the study, our intention was to identify, describe and interpret patterns in the student's writing. We noted the themes inherent in the entries and summarised the topics and concerns described by students. From this, we developed a category system for identifying types of reflective writing. The data showed that students wrote to:

report or describe an incident, event, feeling or lesson;  
review and refocus on a situation or incident by considering and  
suggesting simple alternatives and explanations, reworking intentions  
and outcomes and making plans for further action;  
analyse by questioning or diagnosing the case, comparing and evaluating  
an incident or situation and by speculating on consequences;  
reconceptualise or rework their views and ideas by stating their  
philosophy or vision, contemplating an image of teaching and teachers,  
being insightful about the purpose of education and about self as  
teacher.

However, what was of particular interest was the part the respondents  
had played in the reflective process and what contribution the  
interactive nature of the process made to students' knowledge about  
teaching. To this end, in phase two, we collected survey and interview  
data from the student authors of the journals. Data served to describe  
the type of assistance given, strategies used by respondents and  
benefits of the interaction. Students completed individual surveys  
which asked them to report on how they felt about the process of  
journal writing, how they had used their journal, major themes, issues  
and concerns reflected in the journal entries, benefits of journal  
writing and the significance of its interactive nature.

An interview schedule, informed by a pilot interview and by the survey  
responses, guided the face-to-face conversation. Understandings about  
how students had established a personal style and method of keeping

their journal, what part we, as respondents, had played in the process, and the value of journal writing were drawn from the data. Two of the four students attended a group interview scheduled during the school holidays. The other students were interviewed individually. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. In this phase of the research, we were keen to determine the value of journal writing for student teachers. We were also interested in the students' stories of how they made sense of the journal writing process itself and what contribution the interactive nature of the process made to their knowledge about teaching. The remainder of this paper presents the views of both student teachers and university teachers on their experience of journal writing.

### Reporting the Data

In this section, we use the categories of process and strategies to discuss the experience of journal writing as reported in the surveys and interviews.

### How the Student Teachers Used the Journals

The four students were generally positive about their writing experience. Even though across the group of four, detail and frequency of entry and the reflective nature of the entries varied, all students agreed that the process had been beneficial in some form or other and

that it had provided a forum for discussion that would not have otherwise existed. They also agreed that 'writing it down' helped facilitate thinking through the issues and problems they faced as their teaching skills developed during the extended practice.

Four main uses for the journal emerged from the data. Firstly, students indicated that in many instances the journal had been used as an emotional release and therefore served a therapeutic purpose. The journal provided a safe place for students to record the emotions experienced during the course of the day or the week. It provided an avenue to release tension rather than bottling it up. Therefore, the journal provided a means of capturing the immediacy of the problem. For example, student teachers recorded their frustration with self and/or students as they struggled to appropriately manage their teaching.

Secondly, the journal was a place for student teachers to 'tell' someone what was bothering them: to raise issues, to voice their concerns, their doubts about student's behaviour or learning, or about their own developing teaching skill. The student teachers reported that they said things in the journal that they would not have said face-to-face with their co-operating teachers or to their university teachers. The journals were used as an intermediary. Communicating through writing rather than through speaking seems to have been related to students' level of confidence. One student, for example, reported that in the early stages of the practice she found it easier to 'tell'

her journal than to tell her classroom or university teacher:

'Sometimes I would write it down when it wouldn't be something that I could approach Pat [co-operating teacher] or yourself [university teacher] with. I found it a lot easier to write it down' (Cindy). She indicated that it was a way to let others know how she was feeling and what was worrying her so that they could be aware of the situation.

Cindy wrote,

Rather than putting the pressure on and going up and talking about it on a one-to-one basis, I could write it down. Because often I asked questions in my journal it was a way to seek feedback and help that I might not have had the confidence in the early part of the practice to ask for verbally. (Journal 4)

Students reported that writing in the journal served a third purpose. The journals acted as a tool for analysis. Writing helped the student teachers clarify their thinking. By recording and describing an incident, student teachers often worked their way through what they had seen to be a problem. The student teachers also told us that while writing about the problem they were able to begin to generate solutions for themselves and even before anyone responded to their journal entry they felt that they had been discussing their own teaching. The act of writing in the journal was like having a discussion with themselves about a range of things including events of the day, goal setting and analysis of outcomes. A survey response told us that Terri, "could write problems down and work them out as I was writing" (Journal 2).

The journals often were working documents for analysis and reflection.

Finally, the students reported that their journals were a documentation of classroom events and of their own professional growth. By reviewing the journal's content, each student could monitor her own progress in dealing with issues and events that were a regular occurrence. For example, most reported that the early entries tended to focus on incidences of discipline and classroom management. In these entries, students often asked questions about particular children; their behaviour, and progress. As student teachers came to know the students as individual learners and became more skilled in classroom management, entries of this nature became less frequent and began to give way to journal entries focused on relationships with children and children's learning. Another theme in early journal entries had to do with time-management. The demands of time and responsibility in the practice were such that organisational skills were crucial to success. Throughout the practice students made reference to the need to manage and use their time wisely and to be organised in order to fulfil the many and varied responsibilities of the classroom teacher. Entries which focussed upon personal skill development became more prominent as the field experience unfolded. Student teachers referred to the permanent nature of the journal. One said that 'It lasts for ever'. The journals stood as a record of student's experience in the alternative teacher education programme. By reviewing their journal they were able to relive the experience and observe their own professional growth.

We found that the journals developed as a conversation. Individual entries were not discrete and self contained but were connected through ongoing attention to issues. Questions from one entry were picked up and explored or answered in subsequent entries and comments on the progression of classroom activities and of children's learning were connected and continuing from one entry to the next. This resulted in a sense of a continuing or serial story. University teachers did not respond to, or comment only on the 'here and now' of their classroom visit but through the journal were able to engage in discussion about ongoing issues and incidents which occurred between their visits. Because the journals held a record of classroom events, university teachers were able to have input to events which occurred when they were not physically present in the school or classroom.

#### How the University Teachers Used the Journals

As with the students, there was variation in the way the university teachers used the journals and thus the nature and frequency of feedback varied. All four university teachers recognised it as part of their supervisory role during the alternative teacher education programme but each university teacher approached the task with a different sense of enthusiasm and priority. The commitment was in part related to the university teacher's experience of interactive journaling as well as how convinced they were about its impact on

student teacher's developing expertise. In the main, university teachers wrote in their student's journals during each visit. Visits were typically weekly or bi-weekly and entries varied significantly in length and breadth. Reading the student journals created a way for the university teacher to become informed of classroom events. More importantly, university teachers could gauge the progress made by students and monitor the development of issues and concerns, successes and difficulties as they arose. The journals were a vehicle through which university teachers could monitor student teacher's self-evaluation.

In addition to making comments on a specific lesson, university teachers had an opportunity to 'discuss' with students wider issues which evolved over time. Along with specific feedback related to the lesson taught, the journals were frequently used for 'big picture' discussions. Here university teachers would ask broad sweeping questions and offer support and affirmation for what the student was doing and thinking as recorded in the journal. The journals provided a place to give encouragement not only for the act of learning to teach but also encouragement to continue writing and recording progress in their journals. The university teachers saw their involvement in the journal as a potential motivator for the students to continue their writing. In cases where the classroom teacher was also an active participant in the process, the journal became a forum for a three way discussion.

## Response Strategies used by University Teachers

Although we were confident that the process of journaling was a useful strategy for contributing to reflection on action, we were not overtly conscious of ways in which the interactive process could and would impact on the journal dialogue between university teachers and students. Through data analysis, we determined that our responses to the student teachers' journal entries fitted into three broad categories; asking questions, giving feedback, and providing alternatives.

### Asking questions

Student teachers wrote in their journals about issues which ranged from educational matters including classroom-based concerns about individual children, management, specific lessons, relationships with children and staff, and day to day survival matters; to personal matters, including emotional states, level of motivation, and perceptions of progress. University teachers generally responded in the journals in two phases. An initial positive comment made to confirm students' action was followed by one or more probing questions meant to draw students' attention to certain aspects of the situation. It was intended that the questions would encourage students to contribute knowledge they already had and to bring it to bear on the matter raised. Questioning therefore, was seen as a stimulus to help students make connections between their university learning and

classroom practice and for re-examining knowledge and understandings.

Scenario:

During the field experience, Julie [student teacher] visited a nearby school to observe a teacher in action. She wrote in her journal:

I went to St Luke this week, and watched the year 7 teacher. She gave her lesson by standing at the front of the class and talking at the children for 30 minutes. While it goes against everything we've learned at Uni the kids were actually mesmerised by the teacher and every one of them were paying her their complete attention. Obviously she knew what she was talking about and they enjoyed listening to her.

The university teacher responded:

What did you like about the St Luke teacher? What were her main attributes? Why did the children respond so well? What was she doing? What techniques did she use? What made her a good teacher?

Questions resulted in helping students organise and clarify their thinking and encouraged them to review practice and refocus actions.

In fact, questions acted as a means of sharing experiences and understandings and of elaborating and revising information. Responding

in the form of questions probed student's thinking and extended them beyond the obvious. In this way, we prompted students to verbalise opinions and declare their stance on educational issues. The questions acted as a catalyst for drawing students' attention to issues, concepts and constructs of knowledge and for revealing their personal perspectives on beliefs and teaching philosophies and choices of teaching strategies and approaches.

Students regarded the dialogue instigated by university teachers' questions as cues to extend and challenge their thinking, and for setting more realistic goals.

For example, one university teacher responded as follows:

You have noted that your coding system isn't very useful. Think back to the reason you introduced it. Is the need still here? What might you try next? Have you thought of highlighting? or maybe listing in chart form? Give it some more thought. (Journal 3)

### Giving feedback

In responding to journal entries we confirmed and/or challenged students' personal theories and knowledge of practice which they shared through their writing. In providing positive feedback we emphasised progress and success. We wanted students to feel successful and so we praised small developments and encouraged them to reach out to new

experiences and situations. Feedback in the journals was personal, specific and relevant. It was about teaching and learning, and was located in the context of teaching and learning. Students, therefore, had immediate opportunities to act upon the feedback.

In addition, we used feedback to draw students' attention to specific issues including problems. By offering students specific information and making concerns explicit we were able to suggest reasons for the problem and to guide them to avoid similar problems in the future.

Through feedback we were able to provide expert knowledge in the form of recommendations and suggestions for problem-solving. So rather than provide specific answers, feedback presented students with possibilities for action.

Students reported that feedback contributed to growth in their confidence. It acted to focus their attention on progress and motivated them to continue. In many instances the feedback was a support to their learning, and it affirmed and validated feelings, thoughts and actions. Affirmation was received positively by students and was seen as acknowledgment of work done well, further contributing to growth in confidence.

Scenario:

In the beginning stages of the practicum Cindy made a journal entry and her university teacher responded in the following manner:

A fine start to your journal Cindy, you are recording events, thoughts and feelings. There are objective and subjective statements as we discussed in last Friday's seminar. I am interested in the big issue's you have already identified, eg, the critical place of organisation, explicit expectations, equity. You are being really reflective and thinking about your lessons after the fact. It might be helpful to mark or code your 'reminders to self' in the journal so that they don't get lost in the text. I am able to learn about the children and the class as a whole from your entries and all three of us can watch challenges and successes as you record them. You are getting wonderful support and feedback from Linda [class teacher]. Cindy, I will often write more questions than text asking why you did things as you did, how you might make changes, etc. These questions are intended to 'continue the conversation'.

#### Providing alternatives

Student writing in the journals usually took the form of reporting or describing situations encountered in the teaching-learning process. Often problems were highlighted and solutions sought mainly from a technical perspective of teaching. In responding to students' entries we suggested alternative ways of thinking and doing, and provided guidance in looking for solutions and for reworking problems. In working in this way we acted as a scaffold for learning and the interactive process became a form of coaching, where issues were

identified, suggestions were made and feedback was provided. Rather than give advice, we encouraged students to make their own decisions, to test their assumptions about preferred teaching styles, to make choices, and to resolve and clarify processes. We wanted to give direction, not provide specific answers which could have stifled thinking and analysis. So, by posing further questions and suggesting alternatives we hoped to encourage reflection.

Scenario:

Terri wrote about her experience with a child-centred teaching approach:

What do I like/dislike about what I have been doing? A child-centred approach to teaching is new and frightening. As a teacher I need to have enough control over the class to ensure their conversations during a lesson is about the relevant topic. The actual experience of child-centred learning is new to me and I still have so much to learn. I have been in classrooms where the teachers claim to be facilitators of teaching, even though they still 'chalk and talk'. After this prac I would never be able to 'chalk and talk'. It seems so unproductive.

Terri's university teacher wrote:

So you don't think there is a place for 'chalk and talk', not ever?

The challenge is to recognise which is the best strategy to use for a

certain situation. An eclectic approach enables you to remain open to decide what (strategy) is best when (in a particular circumstance).

Student teachers saw the journal as a place where they could get advice and where classroom teachers also contributed to the journal conversation. The "three way advice" was seen as a bonus. They regarded the act of responding as forcing them to move to a deeper level of thinking. One student wrote, "In my journal I was discussing my thinking, and there was more depth of thought" (Journal 4).

The fact that another person read the journals and commented, encouraged one student to 'think things through to a deeper level.' An outcome of the interaction was that students were motivated to put more effort into the process of journaling.

## Discussion

When students were asked to describe the experience of journal writing, descriptors such as valuable, powerful, affirmative, insightful, reflective, uplifting, positive, and rewarding were used. The students reported that journals are useful but they also admitted that without the requirement of submission, they would have been less diligent in recording entries.

We know that keeping a journal can be problematic and indeed was

problematic for some of our students. There was evidence that some students found the process of journal writing onerous, tiresome and time-consuming. This was particularly so of those students with little experience and skill in journal writing. However, the demands of time, energy and perseverance were overcome by those students who were comfortable with the act of writing and who valued the conversation.

What did keep students going in the task of writing was that university teachers and in some cases classroom teachers wrote in their journals. This interactive process acted in a number of ways. Basically, it became the impetus to continue writing. When application to the task waned, it was the knowledge that entries would be read and a response made that stimulated continued effort. Thus, the dialogue helped to maintain a commitment to the task. One student commented: 'The interaction was one of the main reasons it worked so well.' For some students having a respondent was the only motivation for continued writing. "If you didn't respond I wouldn't have written." For those students who wrote 'because we have to' the dialogue actually forced them to communicate. As one student wrote 'I think it is about time to answer Carla's [university teacher] questions.' However for other students, the dialogue contributed to the quality of reflection when conversations led to a deeper exploration of important issues.

For students, the knowledge that the writing had an audience also acted as a stimulus for continued effort over a longer period of time and gave purpose to the writing. Students reported, "If I knew that no one

was going to read it, then what's the point of writing" and "not having a respondent would make me slacker, I wouldn't have cared so much." For less confident students the journal was a valuable forum for a one-to-one conversation that may not have evolved in face-to-face situations. The journal was safe and private, and enabled the writer and respondent to work closely together. The journal became a support system through which university teachers nurtured students, and in turn students felt journal writing was 'therapeutic'; an opportunity for emotional release. The journal created a place for a type of interaction which added to the quality of the relationship between student and university teacher. Over time, a higher level of confidence and trust developed.

Our response was a second voice, an exchange of ideas upon which to scaffold new thoughts and learning. The saying 'two heads are better than one' was borne out through the interactive journaling activity. Suggestions, views, ideas and perspectives from another person were taken on board and in many cases were reviewed and refocussed and ultimately integrated into the student's personal image of teaching.

Students strongly acknowledged that there were positive gains from the interactive process of journal writing. They saw the process as a two way conversation where thoughts were communicated and discussion took place. In all the journals examined, students maintained a conversation with their university teacher, and in some cases classroom teacher, albeit at different levels of intensity. We, as university

teachers, felt that this dialogue led to a construction of knowledge of teaching. It fostered new insights and heightened awareness in terms of the student's experience of learning to teach. The journal was a place for organising and sharing their ideas and for modifying and shaping action plans. In addition comments by university teachers focused the student teacher's thinking more directly on educational issues and matters of professional growth. Again, for some student teachers, the degree to which this occurred varied according to the value they gave to the task of journalling and the level of reflective writing skill they possessed.

From our interviews we learned that none of the students had continued to keep a journal during their first year of teaching. This was in spite of their acknowledgment that it had been a valuable tool during their teacher education program. When we explored this with them, most students indicated that pressures which came with beginning their teaching careers had prevented them from continuing journal writing. However, it is interesting to note that several indicated that they regretted not having kept a record of their first year of teaching. If in fact the task of journal writing in initial teacher education has been a strategy to encourage reflective thought and subsequent reflective practice for beginning teachers, it seems that most do not carry this strategy forward with them into their beginning teaching.

Although students can see the benefits of journal writing in hindsight, they do not always appreciate the benefits of the task at the time.

What we as university teachers need to recognise is that although we may have the best of intentions in promoting journal writing as a way of fostering professional development and reflective thinking, our data indicated that this does not always happen. If we are to persevere with journal writing in teacher education as a strategy for professional development, then we need to find more effective ways of developing student teacher's expertise in journalling. Reflective writing needs to become a more integral part of coursework, with co-writing a strong feature of this process. Then perhaps there is more likelihood that reflection will become part of beginning teacher's professional repertoire.

As one student wisely reported 'You can't make people serious about journal writing but you can persuade them that it is a good thing by getting them to see the value of what they are doing. There is always going to be a handful in the class who don't want to do it, and who really struggle with it. But I think you can only ever introduce it and start it and work through it' (Journal 2).

The value of two voices has been particularly highlighted in this study. We are convinced that in all cases the dialogue was responsible for sustaining the student's commitment to journal writing. When Nicole reported on her journalling effort during her first year of teaching, she wrote:

I did keep a small journal in the beginning but I found it was static

as opposed to dynamic, because nobody else was involved. (Journal 3)

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