

Crossing the borders between university and workplace learning: Problematising the integration of theory and practice in teacher education

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This paper reports on a Project that aims to assist student teachers in their professional development and learning through their study of the integration of the theory and practice of the disciplines of Literacy Education, Maths Education, and Teaching and Classroom Management. The target group consisted of Education students in the second year of their BA/BT course when the focus of their studies is on curriculum theories and classroom practice. The Project aims to address the complexities of the professions into which students will enter by crossing the borders between universities and schools, developing and implementing curriculum programs, and collaborating with classroom teachers, in order to enhance the learning of student teachers. What became clear, however, was that the integration of theory and practice was not a seamless process. This disjuncture between theory and practice provided an opportunity for student teachers to cross over into borders of meaning, ways of knowing, social and power relations, and values, that challenged them to problematise the relationship between theory and practice. A particular focus of this paper is on students' critical reflection as they crossed the borders between the subject positions offered them in university classrooms and their placement in school classrooms – a situation that enabled them to engage critically with the complexities of learning, teaching and schooling.

Introduction

Attempts to integrate theory with practice were the focus of the Project that is the subject of this paper. We report on the Project that served as a means of structuring and re-conceptualising practices in pre-service teacher education that work towards assisting the development of critically reflective student teachers who can explore and interrogate the borders between theory and practice. We argue that, while the integration of theory and practice in pre-service teacher education is to be welcomed and encouraged, and that partnerships between schools and universities are to be explored and further developed, it is not a seamless and unproblematic process. While the integration of theory and practice is usually addressed in regard to undergraduate learning and the transition that is made from the academy to the workplace (Candy & Crebert, 1990), there are also issues which need to

be addressed when undergraduate learning takes place in partnership with workplace learning. We consider that the kinds of experiences, skills and reflexivity involved in integrating theoretical learning in the university with practical learning in the workplace may point to a useful direction for reconceptualising the nature of teacher education to better fit the demands of the teacher for an increasingly diverse, demanding, and challenging education system. In what follows, we describe and analyse the Project as it has operated during First Semester, 2001 at Australian Catholic University, Aquinas Campus at Ballarat. The reflections and activities of the students, and the reflections of the classroom teachers provide the data for our analysis, and we outline the implications for curriculum development and practice that the research has highlighted.

Structure of the Program

The Project involved the lecturers of Literacy Education, Numeracy Education, and Teaching and Classroom Management, who collaborated with classroom teachers in order to enhance the learning of student teachers. For 10 weeks of Semester 1, 2001, students studied the theoretical component of these curriculum areas in their usual lecture times at university, spent a half a day each week in the school classroom observing the practical application of those theories, then in the following tutorial session, students explored, through reflection and discussion, the integration of the theoretical and practical. Students were timetabled to attend lectures at university on Monday, attend their schools on Tuesdays, and attend tutorial sessions at university on Wednesdays and Thursdays. By this means it was considered that students would be enabled to link the theories presented in their lectures with what they saw in the school classrooms, and then reflect on these experiences in the following tutorial sessions.

Day One Day Two Day Three Day Four

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Key features of the Project were to

- Enable formal academic subjects, specifically key learning areas (KLAs) of the curriculum, to be undertaken in a combination of university and school contexts, thereby integrating theory and practice
- Provide a collaborative context between university staff, classroom teachers, and student teachers, which enhances the learning of all.
- Assist students to reflect critically on their understandings through the keeping of a reflective journal which would facilitate the linking of theory and practice, and enable them to take a more active role in their own professional accountability

In developing our Project we were mindful of the often-cited discrepancy between theory and practice that exists when university-based teacher education is disconnected from schools (Driscoll, Benson & Livneh (1994). Using qualitative methods, Driscoll et al analysed the content of collaborative planning and inquiry in a PDS (Professional development School) in an effort to identify and explain discrepancies among the perspectives of the participants, especially between university and school-based faculty. Results pointed to a number of

logistical arrangements and programming limitations as inhibitors of collaboration; scheduling and time allocations, inadequacies in teacher preparation, and schools' needs to emphasize maintenance of order. It appears that the notion of theory-practice is recursive; it both results in and is maintained by inadequate collaboration between school and university partners in teacher education – a situation we wished to address and rectify.

University/School Partnerships

In recent times, a range of programs has been established involving part of initial teacher education programs taking place in schools. Frequently, while the emphasis in a number of these collaborative endeavours is on teacher professionalism, student teachers with whom they work also benefit professionally. Teachers not only share their own experience and knowledge, they also assist in shaping the learning and professionalism of student teachers (Burrow, 1994; Grundy, 1994; Hatton, 1994, Knight, 1994). In England, Wales, Australia and America, projects of partnerships in teacher education, that focus on providing potential teachers with school based experience have been placed firmly in discourses of teaching and learning (Dobbins, 1995).

In Australia, there have been a number of programs, initiated through professional development funds that aimed at promoting partnerships between universities, education authorities, and teacher organisations. The Innovative Links Project (Yeatman & Sachs, 1995) was one such attempt that used a formalised university/school partnership approach to teacher professional development.

Recent research by Beck, Howard and Long (1999) focused on their development of a Consortium that consisted of employing bodies, schools and Australian Catholic University involved in the preparation of primary and secondary student teachers. The partnership, known as the Teaching and Learning Consortium (TLC) integrated university and school based contexts, where student teachers, academic staff and school personnel had multiple opportunities for integrating theory and practice through a process of reflection on practice. Approximately six weeks is spent at University and six weeks is undertaken in the field.

While we found the research of Beck et al (1999) valuable and informative, our Project differed in that we (a) had concurrent University and classroom based experiences; and (b) focused specifically on particular curriculum areas.

Focus on the early years of schooling

Our Project was prompted by a contemporary focus in Australia on the early years of schooling, and there has been a range of research projects that have sought to find ways of addressing and improving literacy and numeracy learning for children in the Preparatory Year, Year1 and Year 2. This focus on the early years of schooling has also impacted on the preparation of student teachers, and there is now a desirability, if not an imperative, to see that they are competent and knowledgeable in particular programs that are in place in primary schools. While student teachers are involved in a series of Practicums in the classroom during their four years of study, university teachers, classroom teachers, and the students themselves considered that it would be advantageous if student teachers were to spend more time, albeit in a voluntary capacity, in the classroom. In this way, they could see more readily how the new initiatives in the early years of learning were being realised in the classroom; but it was also important that they understood the theories that underpinned these new initiatives. Thus, our Project was generated by a need to integrate theory and practice in the classroom in ways that addressed the perceived enhancement of student learning that would result from this integration, as well as by the more specific aim of linking

the theories of particular curriculum areas with the current emphasis, in Victoria, on the early years of schooling.

At present, the greater majority of Victorian Primary Schools are implementing either the Early Years Literacy Program (EYLP) or the Children's Literacy Success Strategy (ClaSS) (Crevola & Hill, 1998). The former program is seen predominantly in Government primary schools, while the latter is implemented in most Catholic primary schools. Some schools, in both Government and Catholic systems, are trialling the Early Years Numeracy Program (EYNP). Given the present structure of classroom organisation in Victorian Primary schools, student teachers were able to observe both literacy and numeracy learning in the first half of the school day. As will be seen later in the students' comments, this structure had its advantages and disadvantages for students' observations and experiences.

Theories underpinning the research process

Teacher Narrative

In our work, teacher narrative is an important part of the research process (Elbaz, 1991; Connelly & Clandinin, 1992; Jalongo, Isenberg with Gerbracht, 1995; Cartwright & Noone, 1998, 1999). These researchers acknowledge teaching as an uncertain business, and one whose character results from the sense which teachers make of the immediate and broader contexts in which they act. Teachers' and student teachers' stories, derived from critical reflection in class, in journals and in interviews, constitute both data for the Project and the means by which they attempted to give meaning to their activities. The stories are constructed from the student teachers' concerns about their own practices as neophyte teachers, their perceptions of the ways in which theory and practice are integrated in their learning, and of their experiences of focusing more directly on how curriculum theories are realised in the classroom. Teachers' stories focused more on their perception of the needs of student teachers, and the ways in which their classroom learning could be extended and enhanced.

Collaboration between university staff, student teachers, and school staff

Collaboration and partnerships are terms currently in vogue throughout education endeavours, institutions, and literature. What these terms mean, however, is ambiguous and tends to differ according to the context in which they are used.

In recent years, notions of collegiality and collaboration have been frequently articulated in the literature as a range of initiatives has endeavoured to promote more collaborative forms of professional development in the academic community. In relation to these initiatives, Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) note that 'Attractive concepts like collegiality and collaboration are often imbued with a global sense of virtue' (p.63). Hargreaves and Daw (1990), however, challenge this 'sense of virtue', commenting on the paradox of teachers being urged to collaborate more when there is less for them to collaborate about. As they see it, '...collaborative forms of teacher development may...not be empowering teachers towards greater professional independence at all, but incorporating them and their loyalties within processes and structures bureaucratically determined elsewhere' (p. 228). In contrast, Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) offer the term 'collaborative cultures', which are not seen to be established for specific projects; rather, they 'consist of pervasive qualities, attitudes and behaviours...[with] a commitment to valuing people as individuals and valuing the group to which people belong' (p. 66).

We envisaged a collaborative culture that would, acknowledge the teacher's, and student teacher's voice through teacher narrative, provide a context of trust in which student

teachers could share success and uncertainty with a view to gaining assistance and support from the university teachers and classroom teachers, enable the sharing and questioning of beliefs and values; and celebrate the art of teaching.

We saw our collaboration as a reflexive process through which emerged the need for us to be adaptable in our collaboration to the changing circumstances of our Project and of the participants involved. Initially, we directed and shaped the learning in our respective units, providing a structure that enabled students to gradually develop and build on their understandings. But we were also open to students' 'need to know', generated from their experiences in the classroom, and that led us to re-shape the structure of the theoretical learning in accordance with classroom practice. Ultimately, we found that the collaboration between us as academics, between us and classroom teachers, and between us and our students was very much a reciprocal process, as we learned from each other's experiences, shared beliefs and values, and felt collectively empowered in our teaching.

Constructing Subjectivity in Teacher Education

This Project was seen as a vehicle by which we could address an on-going challenge for teacher education. We are seeking ways to better prepare teachers to be professionally and theoretically knowledgeable and capable in an increasingly diverse social, cultural, technical and economic environment, as well as being aware and capable of applying a range of practical strategies in the classroom. This is where the importance of our theoretical perspective on the construction of subjectivity in teacher education is of note. Subjectivity is generally not made problematic in traditional socialisation theory, which suggests that the unitary self selects behaviours, forms of language and attitudes on the basis of a rational consciousness which has the ability to choose between available alternatives (Davies, 1993). Poststructuralist theorists, on the contrary, argue that people are not socialised into the social world, but rather that human subjectivity is formed in and through practice (Bourdieu 1990), and that modes of speaking and acting, attitudes and behaviours are structured and formed in relationships of power and discourse (Foucault 1988).

For instance, the importance of an investigation into the borders between university and workplace partnerships lies in the fact that in a teacher education program there is a tension between development of the individual as a professional knowledgeable in theoretical matters concerned with teaching, learning and with particular discipline and/or curriculum content, and the demands of a professional program that must ensure practical classroom expertise. Student teachers engage in education studies, for a variety of reasons, and with a diverse range of histories, belief systems, goals, values, learning styles and world views. They therefore interact with learning experiences in a range of ways. At the same time, they differ in the degree of understanding of the theories of each curriculum area, and in the understanding of how practices and theories interrelate. In our analysis of the student

discussions in tutorials around their experiences in the classroom, we show how discursive regimes of truth about the programs being implemented in the classroom, and their relationship with and modelling of the strategies used by the classroom teacher, structure and shape the teaching self that students problematised in their attempts to integrate theory and practice. We are striving to acknowledge the power relations implicit in developing conceptions of theory and practice in teacher education, and our focus for reflection here is on the practice of university staff, school staff, and students engaged in crossing the borders between university and workplace learning.

Critical Reflection with Student Teachers

A significant aspect of the Project was the critical reflection that occurred in some of the tutorials. These tutorials, while addressing the theoretical aspects of the curriculum units being studied, as well as students' practical classroom experiences, also had a specific focus of reflecting critically on those experiences, and on the relationship between theory and practice. Perhaps it needs to be clarified, however, what we mean by critical reflection in this particular context, and to make a distinction (though not, we hasten to add, a polarisation) between critical reflection and critical thinking. The term critical thinking is frequently used to denote a strictly intellectual task. That is a capacity to problem solve, and to be analytical (Ennis, 1996). However, the critical thinking, or reflection, that is part of critical pedagogy is concerned with focusing our critical and questioning capacities on the everyday world in which we find ourselves, and questioning and/or challenging the dominant and hegemonic discourses in our society. In short, questioning the taken-for-granted, or the way-things-are. Generally, the particular tutorials where critical reflection occurred were part of the English Curriculum unit structure, hence there is a tendency for students to speak more frequently of literacy learning in the classroom and their perceptions of theory and practice within that discourse. However, as will be seen, they also spoke in general terms of the ways they perceived that theory and practice were integrated in their classroom experiences.

Students reflect on their early classroom experiences

The early weeks of the project were seen by us, the student teachers, and the classroom teachers as weeks of initiation into the classroom structure and organisation, as well as an introduction to each of the curriculum areas. While some of the students had spent time in the classroom in a voluntary capacity during the previous year, most felt quite apprehensive at the thought of entering the school classroom. From their first visit, however, they were quite elated at their classroom time and spoke eagerly in each tutorial of what they had seen and experienced. Initially, and understandably, they spoke of feeling quite overwhelmed at the 'busyness' of the classroom, and did not focus in any detailed way on the interrelationship between theory and practice.

The following are representative of their views:

I was so nervous as I was walking towards the school that I almost didn't go in, but it was okay once I got into the classroom.

I didn't think I'd be nervous because I'd spent some time in the classroom last year. I guess, though, it was sort of different because it was connected with my uni work

The teacher was so welcoming. She really made me feel at home, and introduced me to the children as Ms..... I felt really grown-up, like a real teacher.

All of the staff were great. The Principal introduced us at morning tea, and the other staff all wanted to know what we were going to be doing.

I wish I could have stayed longer, I was just getting used to everything when it was time to come back to uni.

Students Reflect on the Advantages of the Project

In Week 5 of the semester, however, after several weeks of lectures, classroom visits, and discussions in tutorials, a different picture began to emerge of the students' perception of the relationship between theory and practice. Interestingly also was the shifting power relations between us as teachers and the students who were being positioned in our discussions as more knowledgeable in relation to what they were seeing in the classroom and then relating it to the theories presented in lectures. In a tutorial in English Curriculum, they were asked by the lecturer what could they see to be the advantages of visiting the classroom once a week. Following is one response, but it shares similar views with other students:

Practical experience, which is undoubtedly priceless when it comes to our learning. It is one thing to learn the theory, but another to put it into practice. I was nervous about going to schools, but this has put my mind at ease, with the fear of being judged, you know graded, not being something I have to worry about at this time.

In this response, the student is referring to the processes of the formal teaching round, when their performance in the classroom is assessed by the teacher and the university supervisor, and they are ultimately graded (satisfactory or unsatisfactory) on their progress.

Reference to the teaching round is also seen in the following:

I've been able to witness practices discussed in lecture and tutorials in the classroom, hands on straight away. So, it prepared you for your teaching rounds, It was a break from classes and a reminder of why I am studying.

It provides really interesting observation and allows classroom and university work to be related to the classroom situation. I have obtained the general 'feel' of a school situation prior to rounds. I've also found it good being able to communicate with the Principal and feel comfortable in the staffroom.

As with the above student, many others spoke of obtaining the 'feel' of the classroom, which also suggests how they 'experienced' the classroom. This notion of experience has important implications for later considerations of students' self-representation and subjectivity, as their understandings of their competing subjective realities and lived experience in the classroom provided a lens with which to view how power relations structure the classroom, and indeed the relationship between theory and practice.

You get to view the programs and strategies in action, what is theory in uni becomes practice in the schools. It is great to just 'get the feel' of a classroom and observe teachers and their classroom management strategies.

You are able to connect classroom activities, lessons, and learning with those discussed in lectures and tutorials allowing you to gain a greater understanding. It's great to get a feel of classroom management, student behaviours, stuff like that.

One of the mature age students, who had previous experience in the corporate sector, had this to say

It demystifies what a classroom is. I have enjoyed being part of the process of familiarising myself with what a primary school child is – and they are not all the same. You get to see how things like Guided reading and writing happen in ‘real life’. I have often done training courses for work, and been told that ‘this is how it will happen in the office’, but it rarely does. I was surprised to see that what we are being taught really does happen.

Her comments regarding how particular learning strategies happen in ‘real life’ will be addressed later. Nevertheless, it is an early example of how students, and others, can begin to develop the perception that theory is one thing, but it is not something that is actually ‘real’. Interestingly, she notes in her next comments, that what she has already been exposed to in theoretical studies in the University actually does happen in the classroom.

Students Reflect on the Disadvantages of the Project

It was also important that students be asked to articulate any particular disadvantages in the program structure, specifically in regard to their attending the classroom half a day each week. Most spoke of the constraints of time, though in a variety of ways. For instance, some expressed a desire to spend longer in the classroom, while others noted that it had made the rest of their week difficult to manage. This latter group, it should be noted, are not necessarily students who were complaining about not having free time. It is now quite evident that many students need to be involved in part-time employment while they are studying, and in this instance, their time is indeed very limited.

It seems that you are there for a very short time –although it’s probably long enough. You get settled and then it’s time to go.

It would be advantageous to stay in the classroom for a whole day on occasion.

It has been really difficult trying to fit in all that I have to do. I mean, it’s great going into the classroom, but I’m finding it difficult fitting in work, and study, and uni, and going to school as well.

The literacy program at present being implemented in Victorian primary schools occurs in the hours between 9 and 11 each morning. While this structure enabled students to make observations of the teaching and learning strategies for literacy, and to make connections between the theories of reading and writing and what they saw in the classroom, it also meant that they saw little variation in teaching and learning, or indeed, other ways of teaching literacy to young children.

I suspect there is a weekly rotation of activities, so I see similar types of activities each week. I know that my class does write in a diary, but I have never seen it happen. I would prefer to visit more than one classroom, and more than once a week. However, I do not have the time to do this.

It would be good to see other lessons apart from literacy and numeracy

I have become quite familiar with the literacy block structure, and that’s good. But I don’t see other ways of teaching other subjects, or even other ways of teaching reading and writing, or spelling.

It was also noted that, while the teachers were delighted to have the students in the classroom, it placed them under some pressure as, ideally, they were to support the students in their learning, answer their queries, point out particular teaching/learning strategies, discuss curriculum structure, and so on. The following are students' views of this dilemma.

Sometimes the classroom teacher feels pressured to have things extra organised and sometimes doesn't have the time to show and explain things she would have liked to. She always apologises for being so busy, and tries to suggest other times we can talk

The only time I've been able to talk to her is on the way to the staff room, and when she goes on yard duty. That's ok, but so much happens in the classroom that I'd like to ask questions about, and she doesn't have time because she is so involved with each of her teaching groups. I suppose that's part of a normal teacher's day, but the particular structure of the literacy block just doesn't allow her one moment to talk to me.

Students Reflect on the Classroom Tasks

Students were asked to complete specific classroom tasks that were connected with assignments for their university studies. These tasks were specifically focused on the ways that theoretical ideas were being implemented in practice. It was also hoped that students would be enabled to see how the diversity of the classroom and the differing abilities of the children impacted quite considerably on the realisation of theories into practice.

The following comments from their reflective journals in Week 7 are representative of their thoughts:

In being asked to complete specific classroom activities it has made me try to link the theory with the practice of teaching and childhood behaviour within a large group. It has enabled me to observe that the best lesson plan is open to change from other forces.

It made me more aware and able to understand the way the literacy block ran. To be able to see it was easier to grasp than reading and talking about it an uni. Also it gave a greater knowledge as how to perceive children's behaviour and the work they

produce.

I found the interview with the child regarding his maths was so informative. So did the teacher for that matter. She said she had no idea the child had such a sophisticated understanding of number.

Enabled me to see the theory of what is discussed in lectures in a practical way and to be personally involved.

They have shown me how individual students' weak points can change and be the focus for the next day's literacy focus (with the running record). Also critically analysing the classroom practices had helped me understand and think about why the teacher may do certain things.

It makes so much sense of our curriculum subjects. Relating what you and Mary and Ann [curriculum lecturers] do makes sense when you see it in action. If we didn't have this experience, it would be awful because you couldn't relate it to anything you had seen. Say, with Ann, we'd think we were just playing with blocks and stuff, but if I hadn't been able to relate it to the classroom, it wouldn't make sense. It makes me feel much more organised

and up to date with each subject because I have to go into the classroom and then relate that to what we're doing at uni. It's a gradual progress through the semester, not just a mad rush at the end to get your assignment done, as it normally is.

Students' Reflection at the end of Semester

Towards the end of the semester, students spoke more freely about their experiences. They had all very much enjoyed their time, however, the following comments from a tutorial indicate a critical reflexive view of what they had seen. They had been asked to discuss to what extent they'd been able to relate the classroom practices with the theories they'd learnt in their university classes

The discussion went as follows:

Student 1: I found that I was always very aware of what she [the teacher] was doing and tried not to interfere with that. It annoyed me sometimes, because it actually interfered with what I was doing, and she could see that sometimes, but her tasks took priority. Understandable, but it was annoying sometimes.

Student 2: Look, it was really beneficial, but I found sometimes I really wasn't doing anything. It may have been the year level I was in, but I found that I was just watching, and the same thing was happening over and over again. I found I was writing less and less in my journal notes because it was just so repetitive because I was with the same group of kids. I also felt I was patronising the kids.

Pat: What do you mean, patronising

Student 2: Well, as part of the literacy block, students were completing various tasks in groups, and I was also with the same group, so I was helping them with a really simple activity. They were bored, I was bored, and I frankly couldn't see what learning was happening at all.

Student 3: Well, some learning was going on, even if it had nothing to do with the reading lesson. I mean, they were learning how to avoid the teacher's gaze, and get away without actually doing any of the work they were meant to do.

In this instance, the student has commented on the different ways that children learn to 'do school'. He quite clearly noted that the children in the group under discussion had already gained knowledge about how 'school knowledge' is done (Davies, 1993), and had also found ways of resisting both the power relations between teacher and child, as well as the authority relations inscribed in the structure of the learning in that classroom, at that particular time. The student teacher, of course, was positioned to observe the varying strategies children can employ in resisting conforming to the discourse of schooling, or more specifically in this instance the child's involvement with text.

Critical Reflection on Beliefs and Theories

A further discussion took place regarding the notion of beliefs and theories. The Early Years Literacy Program and Children's Literacy Success Strategy CLaSS (Crevola & Hill, 1998) are firmly based on particular beliefs and theories regarding children's literacy learning. Students had engaged with these theories in lectures and in tutorial discussions, but they

had also been encouraged to ask classroom teachers about their perspectives on these. Given the amount of professional development that teachers undertake in order to teach the early years program, it was not considered out of order that teachers would be able to articulate particular beliefs and understandings regarding literacy learning and teaching.

When I asked my teacher what theories and beliefs she had, the teacher I'm with is just a year older than me, so she obviously went straight from high school, well anyway she just laughed at me, and said 'what sort of question is that?' She then said that every child has the right to learn, and to help them learn. I mean, that is based on a theory, isn't it? But she just thought it was a question that had little to do with the classroom.

Yeah, I had that reaction too. My teacher said 'Are you serious?' and I really didn't know how to answer her. I didn't want to push her to answer, but I wanted to know so that I could put her ideas into my journal, and I got really embarrassed because she seemed to imply that what we were learning at uni had nothing to do with what happens in the classroom.

My teacher just started laughing and said, 'Oh that's bull'. He was pretty relaxed, and said that he thought most theories were a load of rubbish and don't work in the 'real' world anyway. He just basically did what he had to do but only just to cover his back.

In these discussions, students were situated in opposition to the discourse of the classroom. They spoke of feeling embarrassed and somewhat uncomfortable at teachers' reactions, and that they had been put in an awkward position in asking what appeared to the teachers to be such 'irrelevant' questions that seemingly had little to do with the 'real' work of the classroom. It needs to be noted that this was not the reaction of all teachers who were asked this question. Comments from some teachers that appear later in the paper indicate their responses to the relationship between theory and practice that the Project hoped to enhance.

The following comment is a further example of the ways in which student teachers were positioned by some teachers to see that the knowledge and understandings gained at university had little to do with classroom learning.

I went into a grade 3 or 4 classroom at one stage, and the teacher was very young, she'd probably been out for about 2 years and she was saying to me she enjoyed uni, but the first two years, it was all irrelevant. She said she could have completely missed out the first two years uni, and it would not have made any difference to what she was able to do in the classroom. I'm only just into my second year, really, so I find it difficult to judge what she is saying. But, if what she said is true, it makes it hard to keep up motivation for study if it's not going to amount to much once I get into the classroom.

The conflict between discourses of the university classroom and school classroom can be seen in this interchange between student teachers and classroom teachers, where students are positioned to be within and against the dominant ideology of the classroom. The teacher articulates the oft repeated cliché that suggests students need to get out into the 'real' world, and denigrate the theory that is learned at university. Blackmore (1999) has spoken of a discourse of denigration, part of a complex network of cultural, personal and institutional practices, where particular discourses about the 'real' world are played out against the discourse of the 'ivory tower'. The particular perspective taken by the teacher is not an unusual position; indeed Walker (2000) has commented that 'For some [teachers], the intrusive role of theory was something they could never come to terms with; their professional commitment was to the pragmatics of solving the classroom situation' (p.241).

Critical Reflection with Classroom Teachers

Shen (1994) has conducted intensive case studies to give voice to practising teachers' views on the preparation of new teachers. Similar to the Driscoll et al (1994) study of the theory-to-practice gap, Shen's analysis identified differences between teachers' focus on the practicalities of teacher preparation and the visions of fundamental restructuring typically found in the literature. In general, the research found that teachers' visions of student teaching focused on such issues as students' level of classroom responsibility and improved coordination between school and university personnel. Our Project sought to address and encourage greater coordination and collaboration between the schools and the university, and the following brief extracts from teacher interviews indicate our success in this regard. In addition, their comments also touch on particularly crucial aspects of our Project, namely the integration of theory and practice, though there are a range of views on how they perceived this happening, and the ultimate value of this process.

It's a very real experience for students. Instead of just talking about when they were at school (which is only prior knowledge), they can see what is happening now.

Obviously it is of great advantage for the students to see the 'real' nuts and bolts of a program. Hopefully the theories of teaching would then make sense to them.

Much more realistic than a lecture situation. Theory doesn't make sense until it's applied in the classroom.

The students are able to experience what it is really like in the classroom. They get the opportunity to put the theory they have into practice.

They can see the Early Years theory in action. Also they can see the extra 'real life' situations that happen in a class that you don't experience in university lessons.

Students begin with ideals about classroom life, skills and management. Well, I suppose we all do. But, with an opportunity like this, students can see the 'reality' of the classroom early on in their training.

Again, we can see some teachers focusing on what the classroom is 'really like'. Similarly, one of the teachers comments on the 'training' the students receive. In both of these views, the discourse of vocationalism is dominant. The vocational view of education – equipping students with skills needed for future employment - also has within this discourse elements of the 'real' world of work placed against the 'unreal' world of the university.

The following comments from teachers continue this theme:

Great preparation for rounds and employment

The more hands- on experiences they have the better. It's all very well to learn about children and strategies for learning, but unless they can actually use these strategies, they are useless

Well, they could see how children learn, they could practise questioning and observation skills, they could use classroom management skills, communication skills, different learning styles.

At the same time, teachers saw it as an opportunity for student teachers, early in their progress through their course to see if classroom teaching was the career they really wanted.

Great opportunity for students to see if this is what they want to do.

It gives them an insight into what goes on in the classroom, dealing with parents, with other staff, and decide if they want to do this job.

These are valid views, and ones which address the dilemma that some students face when, much later in their teaching studies they find that they do not enjoy being in the classroom, and question their choice of career. While we acknowledge that teachers may focus on the 'reality' of teaching in the classroom, or that they may see the discourse of vocationalism as dominant for the classroom, the critical pedagogy of the tutorial session allowed us to problematise for students the different ways in which 'reality' is constructed, and to interrogate conflicting discourses which position individuals in social, economic and institutional contexts.

Students within and against

We acknowledge the work of Lather (1991) who illuminated some of the possibilities and problems of research as praxis; research that encourages people to be reflective, self-reflexive, and to question the status-quo. The challenge of critical pedagogy, while it can allow differences to be rearticulated and reshaped, can be quite disturbing for students who, in the first instance, have been moulded and constrained by 13 years of a transmission pedagogy. Then, in the second instance, asking student teachers, whose ultimate aim is to have their own classrooms, and who generally view 'their' teachers as being the 'expert', to look critically at classroom practices, can be a discomfoting process. A critical pedagogy which provides conditions, in both content and pedagogical forms, for students to question what they experience as a given, which is able to 'contest the hegemony of prevailing definitions of the everyday as the "way things are"' (McLaren, 1994, p. 21), and which problematises education and schooling as a site for the production and reproduction of cultural, moral and national identify, will inevitably become for some students an uncomfortable and disrupting exercise.

As the following discussion indicates, students were made uneasy by the tension between both working with the classroom teacher, and seemingly working against the teacher by critiquing some classroom practices. This went beyond a consideration of the gap that can occur between theory and practice, and placed the students in a situation that asked them to not only cross, but also critique, the border between university and workplace learning. While they generally felt quite comfortable in critiquing the discourse of university learning and teaching, thus conforming in some respects to student discourse, they were disrupted by the notion of critiquing the practices of the classroom, the desired end-point of their studies.

Student 1: I like going in and knowing the structure. Sometimes I find it a disadvantage with my role within the classroom. I'm there to observe, but I'm also there to help. How do you combine those things? Sometimes when I'm sitting back taking notes, I'll notice things I could be doing, or think it could be affecting the way children are behaving. And I'm there to help, so there is a bit of tension between those two things.

Student 2: How can we be expected to be critical when we are expected to fit into the classroom. I mean, I feel it is so presumptuous of me to be critical of anything when I am only 18 months into my course. So, I generally feel, what do I know?

Pat: Well, you have been studying theories in lectures and in your readings and in our tutorial discussions. Haven't you been able to see how, or in what ways, the theories operate or work in the practical situation?

Student 2: Yes, but I have a tendency to think that maybe I haven't grasped the theory well enough, so I'm not looking at it properly when I try to see it in action in the classroom.

Student 3: I don't quite agree with that. I think we have to consider that we are learning the most up to date theories, and that if we can't see them being applied in the classroom learning, we have to look harder, or more critically, or something at actually what is going on. This doesn't mean that we are critical of the teacher. One thing I have learned is that teachers are far from being 'free agents' in the classroom.

Student 4: Yeah right. My teacher said she thinks the literacy structure is far too rigid, but she has to use it anyway because it's school policy.

Student 5: One of the things I have found out is that while there's lots of good stuff going on in the classroom, it is far from perfect. But I'm quite happy with that because from what I've read that's how theories keep on developing anyway, from people trying to do things better.

Student 6: Okay, but that still really pushes us, because we are in the classroom, seeing things that are not all that satisfactory, and knowing that, from what we've learned about some theories, they couldn't work because theoretically they're wrong, and they shouldn't really be done that particular way, anyway.

What is particularly interesting in this interchange is how self-representation occurs within, through and against the discourses made available to us, how student teachers take up particular subject positions, and how this attuned us to the dynamics of power relations. The tension between the expectations of the classroom, the expectations of the university, and the ways in which students 'tell their stories' reveal their struggles with themselves, and with how 'reality' is shaped and experienced in a range of contexts. If subjectivity is understood as a dynamic process, rather than a fixed concept, how these students write and speak their classroom experiences constitutes a way of understanding power and agency. Their grappling with the tension between theory and practice provided a profound space in which to explore the conflicting discourses and power relationships that constitute part of students' struggle as they cross borders between university and workplace learning.

Conclusion

This Project has attempted to shed some light on the border crossings between university and work place, in the hope of problematising the integration of theory and practice in teacher education. The Project made clear that the integration of theory and practice is not a seamless process, for students, for university teachers, and for classroom teachers. At the same time, this disjuncture between theory and practice provided an opportunity for student teachers to cross over into borders of meaning, ways of knowing, social and power relations, and values, that challenged them to problematise the relationship between theory and practice. It also helped locate us, as university teachers, within social, political, and cultural boundaries that defined and mediated in complex ways how we function as intellectuals who exercise particular forms of social and power regulations.

Learning in university, we were reminded again, can still be perceived to be significantly different from learning in the 'real' world. This is particularly so if the traditional stereotypes of learning in higher education are used as examples; generally, for some classroom teachers there is still thought to be little relationship between the active experiences of

engaging in real-life learning in the classroom, and the presumed passive learning of a formal lecture, or indeed the preparation of an essay to be marked. Such differing views, however, do not in any way cover the range of learning experiences encountered by students, as our Project has shown.

We are aware that many innovative practices have been implemented which are designed to equip students with relevant career-related skills and which will support their transition into the workplace. These practices range from problem-based learning, project work, joint ventures with industry, and a wide variety of activities that come under the general heading of experiential education (Candy & Crebert, 1990). Our Project we saw as another 'innovative practice' aimed at crossing the borders between universities and schools, enhancing the learning of student teachers, and assisting in their eventual transition into the workplace.

One of the aims of our Project was to facilitate the linking of theory and practice, thus enabling students to take a more active role in their own professional accountability. This aim was generated in part through our previous experiences with students which had indicated to us that, for many of them, what they are learning is unclear, even in subjects ostensibly basic to their chosen career. Students frequently are unable to see the connection between the type of learning called for, which is largely theoretical and their purposes in learning (which is predominantly practical). The end result of university learning and acquisition of skills is that in the students' minds there is often an artificial separation between understanding and knowledge and they are not clear how that knowledge and understanding is meant to be applied in the workplace. Frequently, a regime of truth is established which derides certain forms of knowledge as 'theory', irrelevant to 'getting the job done'. As we have seen, students were confronted by the conflict between discourses of university learning, and classroom learning, but through the processes of critical reflection were enabled to construct their own meanings and take what they needed from the classroom experience (Munro, 1998)

Critical reflection was a crucial aspect of our Project, and indeed of the pedagogy employed in our university classrooms. It calls attention to both the ideological and the partial as central elements in the construction of teacher discourse and practice (Giroux, 1991). Critical reflection we saw as the means by which we could help students find a language for critically examining the historically and social constructed forms by which they live (Giroux, 1991), and through which they learn. Students were enabled to move 'out of one's place' as bell hooks (1990, p. 145) describes it, and into a space where they could 'confront the realities of choice and location.'

Critical reflection also enabled us to take a politicised view of education, extending the student teachers' experiences in the classroom (both university, and school) to its connection to broader relations of power in education and society. It moved students from the position that centred on the everyday practicalities of the school classroom to a position that problematised the integration of theory and practice in their learning.

As Madeleine Grumet (1991) suggests, the ways in which we tell our stories are negotiations of power relations. Through their reflective journals, and through discussions in tutorials, students were enabled to articulate their questions, concerns and critiques. And, despite the roles prescribed for them as students, they were enabled to take agency in constructing and shaping their lived experiences.

For us, the questions of representation, self-reflexivity, and subjectivity in the collaborative process between ourselves, classroom teachers, and student teachers are ongoing. Our understanding of the multiple ways we create, negotiate and make sense of the power

relationships in our work has been enlarged. Our Project has challenged students teachers and us to continue to problematise the relationship between theory and practice in university and work place learning. We hold the view that we, as teachers, need to assert, rather than retreat, from the critical pedagogies we utilise in dealing with the various differences and perspectives represented by the students who are part of our classes, as they grapple with the disjuncture between theory and practice. We, teachers and students, need to recognise that how we speak our words is a political act (Grumet, 1991). We believe that enabling students to engage critically with the complexities of learning, teaching and schooling, and the integration of theory and practice, enhances their understanding of the implications of professional accountability, and positions them to engage critically with the discourses of learning, teaching, and the workplace.

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