

TEACHERS' STORIES

Gitu Chakravarthy

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to examine influences that shape the make up of teachers. It follows on from Zeichner's (1981, 1982, 1990) and Tom's (1984, 1985) investigation of teacher education and Schon's studies (1981) on professional development. The essential questions remain:

1. What do teachers want to do in their profession?
2. Where have the greatest influences in their lives come from?
3. Have there been any special role models in their lives?
4. What has shaped their professional expertise?

In using these four broad questions, the paper attempts to piece together ethnographic details of shaping influences and teaching goals using the voices of teachers speaking during interviews to the researcher. Teacher- voices present shaping perspectives to experiences, and where possible, these voices have been presented as uttered. Thus presented, the voices show special concerns, values, confusions, attitudes and personal feelings, all of which express nuances of knowledge.

Context of the study

This study was one of a number undertaken through funding provided by Universiti Sains Malaysia through short-term research grants in 2001. While the main thrust of the grants was to investigate knowledge-bases of teachers, the researcher chose different foci in different studies. Thus, in this paper, the approach taken has been to let teachers speak for and of themselves. The underlying belief has been that teachers are not disinterested or objective beings. Rather, they personify subjective beings who are very much influenced by the contexts of their existence. Such contexts include their upbringing, parental values, cultural traditions, educational experiences, religious beliefs and general commitment to duty and obligations.

It is suggested that parents will usually be a major influence in peoples' lives. The term parents is used in this paper in the sense of adults, because it includes within its ambit the influence of close adults in young people's lives. Such adults could even be relatives who are respected and have relationships which are substantive, such as uncles and grandparents. Among the ethnic groups co-existing in Malaysia, it is generally accepted that elders are respected and listened to.

Parental values, in that sense, relates to the overall life-values that the close adults hold to be dear in their lives, and hence provide a kind of philosophical framework that provides a coherence to their lives. These values may include aspects such as 'do no harm to others', 'work hard', 'fulfil your duties' and so on. Such values, it is suggested, affect they way in which individuals behave. Thus the individual youth brought up in an

atmosphere where such values abound is affected positively to reflect such values in his or her work ethics and behaviour.

Cultural traditions often have a way of providing a comforting schema for behaviour and beliefs, as they often belong to the whole community. An example of a cultural tradition among Malays is the idea of respecting elders. Accompanying such an attitude is the tradition of not contradicting or 'talking back' to elders. Such traditions provide security, continuity and coherence to the way in which Malay society binds the old and young. Another such tradition is respect for teachers. While some may argue to say that such respect is declining in the modern era, it is still relevant to observe that Malay society holds its teachers (even the religious ustaz) in regard and respect. Thus, becoming a teacher is often an acceptable profession, and respectable option for professional life. In such contexts, it is not unlikely to have many within the community wishing to become teachers, or at least accepting somebody else's decision to channel them into teaching. Another example of a cultural tradition is the high priority placed on education as a way of life among the Chinese community. It follows that the Chinese will seek to better themselves through education throughout their lives, and that the community will support all endeavours to provide educational opportunities for all, and especially the Chinese Community. This is best exemplified in the existence of a strong system of Chinese education in Malaysia, and the support the Chinese community provides for the system.

Most people have both positive and negative recollections of school and other educational experiences. These may come from both formal and informal educational contexts. Where school experiences have been negative, there is all likelihood that the individual will try avoid all aspects of school life, especially teaching as a career choice. On the other hand, positive experience of education may lead to positive influences, and even choice of teaching as a career. Further, positive school experiences may well impact on the young person's subsequent behaviour as an adult, especially as an adult teacher. Teachers may provide role-models for subsequent teaching attitudes and values and behaviour. In some cases, such influences can have a very strong entrenching effect that becomes difficult to wean away. Subsequent teacher behaviour may be built upon the foundation of views such as 'she was such a wonderful teacher...I want to be exactly like her'.

Malaysia is a multi-religious nation. All the religions have their own values, beliefs and practices. It would be fair to say that all the religions emphasise good behaviour, peace, love, compassion, fulfilling obligations and so on. The important point here is that how an individual behaves, or at least wants to behave, is guided by religious beliefs and values. The stronger the belief and faith in the religion, the more orthodox is practice in line with the tenets of the religion likely. While there is always the likelihood of commitment to the rituals of the religion, it is suggested that strong believers will often be guided by the philosophical and ethical dimensions of the religion. When this occurs in the context of teaching, there is a great likelihood of teachers who care, respect others, love their charges, have commitment to duty and obligations and display moral characteristics that may be acceptable as role-models.

While all of the above can be true and prevalent, it is also likely that individuals can inherit or develop their own work and life-ethics independently, without any necessary belonging to religions. Life is often full of examples of individuals who live full and satisfying lives, displaying honourable and respectable work and life-ethics without commitment to mainstream religions or organisations. Such individuals often answer to the call of their own conscience, and work diligently and ethically, especially in the context of teaching. Such individuals often will complete what they start, will do well whatever they begin, and have high moral self-worth and standards of commitment to life, duty and work.

All of the above can help provide a positive connection between contexts of upbringing and behaviour in later life, especially as adults. In the context of this paper, it is suggested that such influences act positively on teachers as professional in their working lives. While this can be accepted, it is also necessary to record that the opposite is also possible. It is possible that earlier contextual experiences can also affect an individual's development negatively. Poor parental guidance, parental biases, parental prejudices and negative parental work and life ethics can easily influence the young. Such influences, if not countered by some healthy corrective experiences in life, may create teachers with negative outlooks which could affect their obligations as teachers.

Methods and research

The one on one interview is a well established method for obtaining data. In order that it be successful, the interviews have to be conducted in an atmosphere that is confidence building, non-threatening, and encouraging. In such situations, the role of the interviewer is important in that it encourages talk and revelation. The interviewer needs to be expert at non-correction, non-interruptive and an expert at 'prodding' the interviewee in the required direction.

Case studies and ethnography, on the other hand, are aimed at sensitising students to factors that influence teachers and children's perspectives on school situations, and at examining the realities that lie beneath surface appearances.

Ethnography

A definition of ethnography is "the description of the races of mankind" (Longmans Modern English Dictionary). van Lier (1990) suggests that originally ethnography involved anthropologists conducting descriptive fieldwork, but gradually it has moved from involvement with unknown ethnic groups to examining human groups in industrialised society, and then into sociology and education. In education research, learners in the classroom are sometimes treated as if they are members of identifiable groups with identifiable characteristics. Ethnography appears heuristic, with no firm rules and guidelines for scientific research conduct. Rather than being concerned with controlling or isolating factors from the context, ethnographers "refers to the rules, concepts beliefs and meanings of the people themselves, functioning within their own groups", and looking at events in its context (van Lier, 1990, p.43).

Ethnography is useful

“to explore the ideological nature of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation and the inter-relationships between these socially constructed practices within the school and the social, economic, and political contexts within which they are embedded” (Zeichner and Liston, 1987).

Ethnographic studies have been conducted within campus-based courses (Gitlin and Teitlebaum, 1983), as well as during clinical or field experiences (Zeichner and Liston, 1987) and have involved students studying aspects of classrooms, curriculum, and teacher - pupil interaction, all accompanied by varying degrees of guidance from teacher educators. While the kinds of topics that students have investigated through ethnographic studies have been fairly well documented, the specific methodological procedures that have been employed have not been clearly described (Zeichner, 1987).

Attitudes , thinking and cognition

Book et al. (1983) and Lortie (1975) point out that novice student teachers believe that they already know quite a lot about teaching. This is often because of the long ‘apprenticeship’ of their own schooling. Weinstein (1988) found that prior to training, student teachers were already confident that they could deal with problems of teaching in the classrooms, though they were aware of the fact that even experienced teachers tend to have problems.

In reviewing studies on the initial dispositions of student teachers, Carter (1990, p.293-294) points out various research findings. One study (Ball, 1988) shows that while most mathematics teachers had rule bound knowledge of their subject, very few had substantive understanding of underlying key principles. A second study (Paine, 1988) reveals that student teachers’ understanding of pupil diversity was superficial, and not realistic enough with regard to specific contexts. Amarel and Feiman-Nemser’s (1988) study showed that student teachers were primarily interested in managing the class and feeling at ease in front of pupils. Student teachers were more concerned about gaining practical experience rather than gaining knowledge of student learning, or subject knowledge. In fact, students tended to dismiss the value of the coursework even before these courses started.

What is significant about these findings is that teacher education will have to convince student teachers that it has a valuable contribution to make to students’ professional learning, and perhaps to make students aware of new ways of looking at school life in order to make them aware of the complexities involved.

Knowledge

Jackson (1968) identified four recurrent themes in his interviews with fifty outstanding teachers: immediacy (teachers looked out for immediate and spontaneous signs of how

well things were going in class), informality (in their relationships with pupils, and their distrust of formal tests as true measures of teaching ability), autonomy (their dislike of curricular constraints and administrative intrusions), and individuality (seeing individual pupil's progress). He also characterises the teachers' language and thinking as being conceptually simple. Jackson (1968) suggests that a more deliberate (or reflective) style might be prevalent during the "preactive" phase when planning the lessons, while an intuitive approach may predominate during the "interactive" phase of actual teaching, given the uncertainties and complexities of classroom life.

Borko et al. (1988) studied the thinking and planning of novice teachers and found that while initial views of successful teaching were the same and did not change with time, the views of strong and weak students about what was considered to constitute unsuccessful lessons did change. Stronger teachers engaged in more complex planning activities than weaker ones, and generally anticipated possible problems and solutions.

Clark and Yinger (1987) in a review of research findings suggest that teacher planning is of five kinds: yearly, term, unit, weekly, and daily. Only seven percent of teachers listed lesson planning as important (p.87). Findings from other studies indicate that the greater proportion of planning time was spent on the content to be taught, followed by planning instructional processes, and finally by defining objectives (p.91). Clark and Yinger (1987) conclude that teacher planning seems to influence opportunity to learn, class grouping, classroom processes and content coverage. However, finer classroom details, being unpredictable, are not planned for, and "...once interactive teaching begins, the teachers' plan moves to the background and interactive decision-making becomes more important" (p.95).

Expert-novices studies have led to the finding that experts have a richer repertoire for reporting on organising and managing instruction. When compared to novices, experts also have well developed guiding routines and action strategies for taking over someone else's class (Carter et al., 1987). Carter et al. (1988) report that experts also tended to be more interested than novices in signs of pupils working. Furthermore, their study also revealed that teachers (but rarely novices) tended to view classroom scenes as "typical" and "untypical". Once experienced teachers classified a lesson as typical, they were no longer interested in that lesson, but paid attention to that which was perceived to be atypical. Experienced teachers also had a greater ability to recall significant classroom events, as well as more complex understandings of the classroom learning and teaching when compared to novices (Peterson and Comeaux, 1987).

Berliner (1987) found in a study of simulated teaching tasks performed by three groups (experienced / expert, less experienced / novice, and inexperienced / postulant) that the greatest differences, as expected, were between the most and least experienced groups. Experienced / expert teachers

"appear to use their rich schemas about students, their large store of episodic knowledge, and their unique memory to analyse student work...differently. These same cognitive processes are also used to develop plans for instruction that are different. In short, our

specially selected experienced teachers often acted like the experts we thought they were..." (p.76).

Teachers' practical knowledge may be studied in terms of personal practical knowledge and implicit theories, classroom structures and comprehension, and how knowledge is used to plan and carry out instruction (Carter, 1990). Research on personal practical knowledge, as pointed out earlier, focuses on teachers' personal understandings of their teaching circumstances. Elbaz (1983) suggests five broad domains of practical knowledge : self, milieu of teaching, subject matter, curriculum development and instruction. Such knowledge is organised according to three levels, namely rules of practice, practical principles and images. Metaphors in teachers' thinking, it is suggested, are a further useful way of finding out how teachers view problems and solutions to these problems, as well as to the types of knowledge that teachers have (Munby, 1986,1987 ; Munby and Russell, 1989). Images may be looked upon as a type of knowledge that links past and future into a personally meaningful present experience, revealed quite often in teacher narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, 1986, 1987). Such studies of teachers' personal knowledge, being focused on the individual personal experiences, reveal the characteristics of teachers' knowledge, rather than what teachers know (Carter, 1990). Carter (1990) suggests that implicit in much of the research on learning to teach is the personalised view of teachers' knowledge, which sees teachers' practical knowledge as personal and idiosyncratic (especially in those studies which focus on the results of beliefs, attitudes, orientations and perspectives). As such, the "issue then becomes one of how settings affect the development of personal perspectives, rather than of how teachers learn a defined body of knowledge about practice" (p.302).

While all these approaches are available, the research approach chosen for this paper rests on the tested face-to-face interview. In most cases, it was conducted once, but where required, the teachers were willing to come back, and a second round was conducted. In a few cases, the interviews were extended into a second session where required. The subjects presented here were selected on the basis of their willingness to have their views quoted (albeit anonymously), ethnic background and interesting and contrastive positions. The underlying assumption is that 'stories' have combined narrative, descriptive, subjective, interpretive and value-laden dimensions that tell more than any simple survey can reveal. A story is valuable because it is a "mode of knowing that captures the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs" (Carter, 1993, p. 6). It is acknowledged that stories represent ways of knowing and thinking that is suited to research about teachers and teaching (Carter, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). The selection of discourses was subjectively made by the researcher from a 'post-structuralist' perspective, which does not deny or deride subjective aspects of research observations. In essence, the researcher takes the perspective that his observations are valid, and have value from his experience of life as a teacher, school administrator, teacher educator and researcher. The stories are reproduced as related, hesitation and all.

Voices

The teachers interviewed here were all on a three year Arts degree programme at Universiti Sains Malaysia, focusing on English Language and Literature Studies. Almost all of them already have teaching experience and qualifications which allowed them to teach. The views represented here are of :

Teacher 1: A Malay lady, 33 years of age

Teacher 2: An Indian lady, 30 years old;

Teacher 3: A Chinese man, 36 years old; and

Teacher 4: A Malay man, 28 years old.

Teacher 1, the Malay lady, comes from Taiping in Perak state. Her experience of teaching life included working as a primary school teacher of English and Mathematics.

For her, “teaching is Allah’s gift to me... He chose me for this... this duty... it is ...serious business... job... to teach... not just play and waste time... Teaching is an order from Allah to me to do the best I can in my life... teaching others... to know... to be better... themselves... better people”. Thus, teaching becomes a holy mission in the case of Teacher 1. Any failing in this regard is equal to transgression of religious obligations.

“I teach all... fairly... don’t care race or religion... all the same to me... you want to learn... I have to teach... it is my duty... I have to make sure they learn... know... study... study what they have to study... especially English... if you don’t learn you will be lost... especially the rural children... they don’t realise... how serious it... English is...”. For Teacher 1, the holy mission requires non-partisan teaching which involves making children “Learn, Know and Study”.

“My mother is the most... was... the most important person in my life... she is a wonderful person... she did not study... no school and all that... but she knew... knows a lot... she works so hard for all... children... husband... grandchildren... relatives... other kampong children... never complain... always smiling... always helping... very religious... I say she is a very good Muslim... her intentions... we call this ‘nyet’ are always good... help others... that is what Allah ask us to do she will say... she used to tell me that whatever we do, we must help others”. Thus from her mother Teacher 1 learnt to value helping others, being a good Muslim and keeping a smiling demeanour.

“Also Cikgu Azmah... she taught maths... me maths... she always explained... always gave examples... explain again and again until all understand... all... *ta apa pelan pelan faham saja* (“does not matter... go slowly... just make sure you understand”)... very good teacher... that is why I love maths... she will tell stories like mother give you two ringgit... say buy two eggs... some *kangkong*... *satu roti*... how much balance... real life maths... I also teach... taught like that”. Her mathematics teacher was another important influence who helped shape her mathematics methodology, and the importance of understanding.

“Mrs. Wong was another great teacher... English... we always wait and wait for class... English class... so interesting... she jokes... joked a lot... made us laugh and

laugh... then she always tells stories... don't know real or not... but always got stories to tell... in Form one... after recess class mostly all will fall asleep after recess food... you know... but Mrs. Wong... no one slept... even sleep also wake up-lah... such nice stories... kings-lah... queens... princesses... pirates... old ladies... real or not... she make me believe... maybe the way she says it... Best way to teach... must tell stories... get pupils interested... love the stories... love the language... think... maybe how she told... not what she told... is important... because... because I cannot remember any stories you know... but they were good stories... do you know what I mean? For Teacher 1, English language teaching became associated with liveliness, jokes and stories. English language lessons would have to be fun.

With regard to the greatest influences professionally, Teacher 1 was quite sure it was teachers like the two described above, and good people (like her mother) who have affected and shaped an attitude to teaching that saw her duty being best described as a mission and the need to combine fun and understanding into her teaching.

For *Teacher 2*, who comes from Parit Buntar, but is now resident in Kulim, on the other hand, teaching is a profession that “is not easy... you have to work and work... never ending... do this... do that... so many things to do... all at the same time... imagine you are teaching... office boy will come and say so and so wants to see you about this or that... you go... and actually not important... when you finish... class over sometimes you have to go back to somebody else's lesson and collect your *barangs*... you know books... record book and all... then at the end... they will ask you finish syllabus or not... how to explain you called me to come what... very unfair”. Teaching is thus seen to be chaotic, stressful, and top-down in terms of impediments to doing one's duty.

“Say what you want... must finish the syllabus... bottom line-lah... nobody will help you when you have not finished syllabus... if you finish... nobody can say anything... HM... other teachers... *Panita*... parents... you know even students now dare to say you have not finished syllabus... I was teaching history... how can... sometimes you see there are more chapters and items than school weeks... lesson time to teach... finish syllabus... ok-lah I finish the syllabus... don't get me wrong... I teach”

“My father was the one who told me to become a teacher... said it was the best job for a girl... you work half a day... weekend... school holidays... good job... salary ok... and time to take care of family... especially afternoons and all... he taught me to be honest... finish your work... actually finish everything... especially food on your plate... never waste... what you must do, do... duty is like God... he'll say...” For Teacher 2 then, though chaotic, finishing obligations and duty was God ordained and had to be done. Perhaps part of the stress mentioned earlier comes from the conflict between a profession not chosen by oneself and unreasonable pressure from those in authority, compounded by a personal value that emphasises duty fulfilment.

“The person who impressed me most was my auntie... father's side... was a teacher also... she was always working... marking books... reading up... making charts... and looking after the family... me... she never complained... she would say... finish all

first... then sit down... why complain... you are a teacher... not a rich businessman with workers... work". Teacher 2's auntie therefore reinforced her father's mandate to finish obligations by presenting work as obligatory and necessary.

"I think I'm like her... strict... hard working... actually very hardworking... but fair... kind... I mean... as long as you respect me... don't give me trouble... I'm nice and kind... you know sometimes I *belanja* some of the poor children *makan* when I know they did not eat because no money... must respect my work... don't say I'm lazy... never finish syllabus all that"

"Am I a good teacher?... don't know... yes... I think I am... I work very hard... I finish all the work... all marking... all chapters... what more do you want?... I am what I am because of me... nobody taught me... college... ok-lah... but all in the past... cannot remember... actually we all knew nothing about what they talked about... all theoretical... I mean even time... only when you teach for long you know time is passing... time to finish lesson... speed up... repeat etc... in college everything is new and strange... even carrying two piles of exercise books... teaching aids and textbooks... you only know when you carry yourself... and walk... stairs... college... aiyo... we were so innocent".

Teacher 3, a Chinese father of two boys, "teaching is fun... wonderful... I mean you are with young people... young people... not old fellows always worrying about this and that... you teach them... they learn... I mean you can see the results immediately... have you seen their eyes open... I mean like... light up? ... you know... their eyes tell you they can see... understand... where else can you see immediate results... maybe cooking... ha..ha... fried rice... ha... ha... you know... come on man... they ask for nothing... they want to learn... happy to learn... you teach them they are happy... *terima kasih cikgu... thank you cher*... where can you get?

"ok... ok... English maybe is different... I used to teach maths... quite straightforward... you teach they understand... they learn... once they learn... they know... I mean it is easy... you know... you just have to teach... don't confuse the issue... duty all that... maths... I can close my eyes and teach... where can you get paid doing something so easy as talking and explaining what you know... some more... don't have to think... have textbooks... revision books to help you".

Teacher 3 sees teaching as a joyous career. Results are immediate and gratifying, with children seen as being youthful, non-problematic, thankful and teachable. His confidence and self belief are actually infectious as far as this researcher is concerned. A quiet person when observed, he has literally transformed into an advertisement for teaching. Maybe because I have focused on literature and pedagogy, I have missed out this aspect of many of these teachers' lives. As the following explains, he sees teaching as controllable, unstressful and generally happiness filled. It is easy, especially because maths as a logical activity presents solutions automatically, which Teacher 3 is instinctively aware of.

"I was actually working as an accounts clerk first... the pay... prospects were better... but dead-lah... I mean the place was dead... how to say... it was work... work... work... 8.30 to 4.30... sometimes overtime... all serious... paper work... telephone... deadlines... take turns for lunch... ha..ha... one time I asked toilet also take turns ah... they did not like that..ha..ha... who cares... dead place... I knew I cannot work like that... then I got accepted for teaching in college... I mean people talk of teaching as hard..what hard... what stress... hey...they go to class late... sometimes don't go... ha... ha... HM not in... they also not in... ha... ha... sleep in class... tell monitor to keep class quiet... teaching is in your control... you control... just you and the school children... and subject... people know that you are serious and you work... they leave you alone... come on man... people are laughing... joking... sleeping ... reading papers... playing chess... even knitting in the staff room... free periods... stress-ah... go out and work... hire and fire... then they know"

"Nobody influenced me to be a teacher... actually all my people used to look down on teachers... no money... accounts... business....these were good jobs... so I was lucky to become a teacher... no change that... ha... ha... teaching is lucky I chose to become a teacher... ha... ha... it is not true that there is no money... you can earn a lot with tuition... yes I give... but never my own school people... in future I may change because all of them are doing left and right... but now... I am ok... my wife works as assistant to boss... we are ok..."

"Maths was always easy for me... Chinese school... you know... maths and science... dedicated teachers... that is why I wanted to be an accountant... all this talk in college... methodology and all that is rubbish... maths you teach the principle... they understand... they see you do... they do... they learn... maths you learn as I talk to you and do the sum in front of you... show you... what methodology... ok English I cannot say... don't get angry-ah... I don't know... I have not taught English... only when I teach I will know... maybe... ha... ha... I'll teach maths in English... ha... ha... I came on this course because my HM told me apply... my English is ok... also I want to improve myself ... graduate... you know"

"Special influence... maybe... maybe... my teachers... they were all good... they made maths easy... explained clearly... also... I was good in maths... no problem... I just know how to teach because the maths problem is logical, and once you use the correct principle... the answer must come... that is all... no... I will not quit teaching".

Teacher 4 perhaps is the most laid back of the four. He is aware of his limitations, especially in his English language abilities. He knows he is weak, but does not see it as a big problem, because he believes he will become better in time.. More important, "if I don't teach English... who will... very few people can speak... write English well... Malaysia need English teachers... I came form Sik... you can counts English speakers... all cikgus... maybe DO got... so I learn-lah... some more scholarship"

He sees reading and work as learners' salvation to English proficiency. "Teaching English means they must read a lot and lot... you know... reading making a man... Bacon... Byron... you know... what we learn on the course... I'll make them *baca*

baik baik... if they can read... they will improve... sure improve... trouble... they don't want to read... TV... play... even video games... no... not in Sik... but everywhere... don't want to read... force them... library books... newspapers... what... newspapers in education... you know... read... can have activities also"

"Also... I'll give lots of exercises... more they do... better... finish textbook... workbook... revision... Perspektif... Lestari... Sukses... Praktis Topikal English... many got... the more they do... confident-lah"

He did not think of being a teacher at all. "Actually I do not want to be teacher... I wanted Police... not selected... but selected for teacher training..MPI... Ipoh... so go-lah... actually my friend's father ask me to apply... gave me forms... keep his son company... but he got Ilmu Khas in KL... so... then you know... one sem... then one sem... LM... Latihan Menagajar... then exam... then posting... no time to think... actually teaching not bad-lah... I teach KT and PJ... all praktik subjects... but you can give notes also... quite easy... use the books because they buy the books... we finish it... we finish syllabus... because chapters follow syllabus topic... even now I can teach this... PJ... you know-lah"

"Influence... no-lah... I don't think anybody influence me... I am independent sorts... I like outdoors... praktik things... I do... you make mistake you learn... no... no one influence me... no role model-lah... all same... all teachers work hard... teach you to pass exams... only thing I don't like... sometimes no homework... then suddenly 30 pages... I don't like... ah... influence against... I always give everyday... not 20... 30 pages".

Discussion

The four voices presented here represent interesting, valid, varied and context-related responses to questions pertaining to their professional leanings. They show the multifarious issues and dimensions that impact on teaching. It is relevant to note that these voices represent sincere reflections of what each one values, aspires to do, and where each has come from. While revealing personal slants, they also reveal conflicting understandings and different interpretations of what teaching is about. More important, these teachers obviously believe in the important roles they play, believe in what they do, think what they do and believe in are valid, and see them themselves as essentially decent teachers. No one wants to be rated a 'master teacher' (at least at this stage), yet do not value their input to teaching any less.

It will be valid to ask what the responses would be if these voices were added to, and we obtained narrations of other teachers' lives and professional developments. These are limited perspectives, but their value lies in the ways in which they create a web of distinctive connections and diversions, all of which have their own validities and relevance in the context of the dynamic, evolving and non-static world of education. They show individual responses and strategies of coping that have been built on each individual's knowledge, values, upbringing, religious inclinations, ethnicity, cultural traditions and influential others.

Conclusion

It would be stating the obvious to say that there needs to be more research such as this, and that the more we learn, the more we will be able to chart the major influences that impinge on teachers' lives. In particular, we may learn to acknowledge the powerful influences that mould the individuals before they enter teacher education institutions. In doing so, teacher education may be able to provide valid recognition of where the teacher-to-be comes from, recognise the individual's strengths rather than weaknesses, and legitimise each one's uniqueness as teachers. In this way, institutions may be able to accommodate variety, recognise that each is different, and that perhaps each contribution adds to the whole.

As more such voices are heard and analysed, we can add to the range of questions to ask, the range of dimensions that impact on teaching, and the overlapping influences that shape teaching and learning. More importantly, we tell teachers that they matter, and that their voices must be heard.

The research for this paper has been funded by a Universiti Sains Malaysia's short-term research grant. The researcher is grateful for this funding.

References

- Beyer B. K. (1984), "Improving thinking skills- defining the problem", Phi Delta Kappa, vol. 65 No. 7 p. 486-490
- Boud, D. Keogh, R. and Walker, D. (1985) Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning, London: Kogan Page.
- Bullough R.V. and Gitlin, A.D. (1989), "Toward Educative Communities: Teacher Education and the quest for the reflective practitioner", International Journal of Studies in Education, vol. 2 no.4 p.285-298
- Calderhead J. (1989), "Reflective Teaching And Teacher Education", Teaching and Teacher Education, vol. 5 No.1 p.43-51
- Calderhead J. (1988), " The Contribution of Field Experiences To Student Primary Teachers' Professional Learning", Research in Education, p.33-49
- Calderhead, J. (1987), Exploring Teachers' Thinking, London: Cassell
- Carr W. and Kemmis S. (1986), Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research, East Sussex: Falmer Press
- Carter, K. (1993). "The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education", Educational Researcher, 22(1), 5-12.
- Carter, K., (1990), "Teachers' Knowledge and Learning to Teach" in W.R. Houston, M.Haberman, and J.Sikerla, (Eds), The Handbook of Research on Teacher Education, p.291- 310, New York, Macmillan.
- Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F. M. (1996). "Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes: Teacher stories- stories of teachers-school stories-stories of schools". Educational Researcher, 25 (3), 24-30.
- Clandinin D. J. and Connelly, F. N. (1987), " Teachers' Personal Knowledge: What counts as Personal in Studies of the Personal", Journal of Curriculum Studies, vol. 19 no. 6 p. 487-500
- Cruikshank D.R (1985), " Uses and benefits of Reflective Teaching" Phi Delta Kappa, vol. 66 No. 10 p. 704-706
- Cruikshank D.R (1987), Reflective Teaching, Preston, and V.A.: Association of Teacher Education.
- Cruikshank D.R. and Applegate J. (1981), " Reflective Teaching as a strategy for teacher growth", Educational Leadership, vol. 38 no.7 p. 553-554
- Dewey, John. (1933), How We Think, Boston: D.C, Heath and Co.
- Dewey, John (1938), Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston

- Elbaz, F. (1988), "Critical Reflection on Teaching: insights from Freire", Journal of Education for Teaching vol. 14 no. 2 p. 171-181
- Feiman-Nemser, S. (1990), "Teacher preparation, structural and conceptual alternatives" in W.R. Houston et al [Eds], Handbook Of Research on Teacher Education, p.212-233 New York, Macmillan.
- Gauthier D.P. (1963), Practical Reasoning, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Giroux, H. and McLaren, P. (1986), "Teacher education and the Politics of engagement: The case for democratic schooling", Harvard Educational Review, vol. 56 no.3 p.213-238.
- Griffiths, M. and Tann, S. (1992), "Using Reflective Practice to Link Personal and Public Theories", Journal of Education for Teaching, vol.18 no.1 p. 69-84
- Grimmett, P.P. (1988), "The Nature of Reflection and Schon's Conception in Perspective", in P.P. Grimmett and G. Erickson, (1988), Reflection in Teacher Education p.5-15, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hayes, L.F. and Ross, D.D. (1989), "Trust versus control: the impact of school leadership on teacher's reflection", International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education vol.2 no.4 p.335-350
- Kemmis S. (1985), "Action Research and the Politics of reflection", in D.Boud, R. Keogh and D. Walker [eds.] Reflection: Turning experience into learning, p.139-163, London: Kogan Page
- Liston, D.P. and Zeichner, K.M. (1987) "Reflective teacher education and moral deliberation", Journal of Teacher Education, vol.38 no.6 p. 2-8
- Munby and Russell T. (1989), "Educating the reflective teacher: an essay review of 2 books by Donald Schon", Journal of Curriculum Studies, vol. 21 no.1 p.71-80
- Noddings N. (1984), Caring: a feminine approach to ethics and moral education, Berkeley: University of California Press
- Nunan, David. (1988), Syllabus Design. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richert, A. (1990), "Teaching Teachers to Reflect: A Consideration of Programme Structure," Journal of Curriculum Studies, vol. 22, no.6, p.509-527
- Ross, E.W. and Hannay, L.M. (1986), "Towards a Critical Theory of Reflective Inquiry," Journal of Teacher Education, July-August, p. 9-15
- Russell, T. (1989), "Downwriting reflection in action in the classroom: searching for appropriate methods", International Journal of Quantitative Studies in Education, vol.2 no.4 p.278-284
- Schwab J.J (1971), "The practical: Arts of eclectic, School Review Vol. 79 p.493-543
- Schon, D.A., (1987), Educating the Reflective Practitioner, San Francisco, Ca, Jossey-Bas.
- Schon, D.A., (1983), The Reflective Practitioner: how professionals think in action, New York, Basic Books.
- Schulman L.S (1987), "Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the new reform", Harvard Educational Review, vol. 57 no.1, p. 1-21
- Smyth, J. (1989), "A critical pedagogy of classroom practice", Journal of Curriculum Studies, vol.21 no.6 p.483-520.
- Smyth, J. (1984), "Teacher-as-collaborators in clinical supervision: Co-operative learning about teaching", Teacher Education, vol.24 p.60-68.
- Tom, A.R (1987), "Replacing pedagogical knowledge with pedagogical questions" in J.Smyth [ed] Educating teachers: Changing the nature of pedagogical knowledge, p. 9-17, London: Falmer Press
- Tom, A.R. (1985), "Inquiring into inquiry-oriented teacher education", Journal of Teacher Education, vol.36 no.5 p. 35-44
- Tom, A.R. (1984), Teaching as a moral craft, New York: Longman
- Valli L. (1990), "Moral approaches to reflective practice", in R.T. Clift et al [Eds], Encouraging Reflective Practice in Education, p.39-56, New York: Teachers College Press
- Vedder, J. and Bannink, P. (1988), "A model of reflective teacher education in the Netherlands: A few ideas on teaching practice", European Journal of Teacher Education, vol.11 no.1 p.9-11
- Wallace, M.J. (1991), Training Foreign Language Teachers: a reflective approach, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Wubbels, T. and Korthagen, F.A.T (1990), "The effects of pre-service teacher program for the preparation Reflective Teachers", Journal of Education for Teaching, vol. 16 no. 1, p. 29- 36
- Zeichner, K.M. (1990), "Changing Directions in the Practicum: looking ahead to the 1990s", Journal of Education for Teaching, vol. 16 no. 2, p. 105-132
- Zeichner, K.M. (1981/1982), "Reflective teaching and field based-experience in teacher education", Interchange vol. 12 no.4 p.1-22.