THE LITERATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER: INVESTIGATIONS OF CRAFT KNOWLEDGE
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This paper is situated within a number of perspectives, and takes these perspectives as the guidelines for making suggestions for research in Malaysia. While the paper is essentially concerned with educational developments now and in future in the country, it also embarks on suggestions for the study of literacy. Literacy in this context is not seen in its traditional guise as learning to read and write, or the encoding and decoding print, but rather as a more open and encompassing state of affairs. Literacy in this paper is seen as 'an ongoing process of being able to perform'. Seen within such a broad perspective, literacy accommodates abilities and skills in diverse subject areas, as well as in specific functions. My interest here involves research pertaining to teacher:

1. literacy
2. education
3. professionalism and development.

LITERACY:

The term literacy has undergone numerous changes. Definitions of literacy should involve considering its functions (how literacy can help individuals) and how individuals can use literacy (Heath, 1983). From sociolinguistic (Stubbs, 1980) and psychological (Scribner and Cole, 1981) perspectives, literacy has come to be seen as a social phenomenon (Levine, 1985; Cook-Gumperz, 1986). Where children are concerned, Clay (1991, 1979) proposed the idea of emergent literacy, which suggests an on-going process rather than mastery of specified pre-reading skills. An emergent perspective focuses on the constructive ways in which children draw upon language skills and a vast array of background knowledge about the physical world, people, texts and written language. It is suggested that children use their knowledge in meaningful ways (Crawford, 1995), thus providing a change in the focus of literacy from one of teacher-directed acquiring of skills to one learners making meaning. As such, legitimate areas for research relating to literacy are processes (Goodman, 1986), and access to supportive literacy environments as indicators of later literacy (Dickinson, 1994). Barton (1994) disagrees with past attempts to isolate literacy in order to provide a focus, and proposes instead, an ecological approach, which involves a shift to studying literacy as "a set of social practices associated with particular symbol systems and their related technologies" (p.32). To be literate, he suggests, "is to be active...and confident within these practices" (p.32).

The growing reality of changes to areas such as citizenship, working lives and community (Kalantzis and Cope, 1999) new global orders, multilingual and multicultural diversity, as well as the fact that there is no longer as single English, but differentiated Englishes (Wilson, 1999) necessitate new paradigms for literacy pedagogy. Wilson (1999) suggests that the future lies in 'Multiliteracies', and argues that "being literate in one way by no means ensures being literate in other ways" (p.23). Literacy education has to move away from basics onto providing for a multi-literate person aware of and competent in critical literacy (1999) with the ability to access and use information.

TEACHER LITERACY:

The discussion above highlights some salient issues in the realm of literacy, particularly from the perspectives of what it is, what it is for, and how we can study the phenomenon. Further, it also draws attention to the need for flexibility in interpretations as they relate to differing needs, and different individuals in differing contexts. Seen in this way, literacy is no longer a once-and-for-all-acquired skill. Rather, it should be viewed as an ongoing and flexible range of skills that enhance an individual's thinking and linguistic competence initially, which will lead to competence and achievement in a range of functions and contexts.

The general emphasis has, of necessity, been on literacy in the system of education in general, and schools in particular. The focus has been on the development of literacy among children as a way of fostering enlightened and responsible citizenry. What then are our expectations for literacy as pertaining to the needs of teachers, and specifically, English language teachers?

1

I would like to suggest that we need teachers who have developed multiliteracies relating to their own:

a. linguistic competence,
b. overall coherence as individual selves,
c. functioning as professionals and citizens,
d. knowledge of educational curricula,
e. empathy with the cultures within which they operate and
f. competence in / with the technology of learning and teaching and communicating.

It should be noted that this attempt at isolating the different literacies is merely for convenience in discussion. They are not discrete, and as such should be seen as linked and overlapping.

It would be fairly obvious that a teacher should be relatively literate in terms of his own subject specialty as well as the medium of instruction. To put it simply, we expect teachers to have a decent level of knowledge about the subject that they teach, whether it be art, mathematics, biology or moral education. This makes two assumptions about the state of affairs in schools. In the first place, it assumes that the teachers are specialists in the subjects that they teach. This assumption places the onus on the teacher to seek knowledge and become specialists. Second, it assumes that the school takes the responsibility of providing specialists to the classrooms. This assumes that the school does not prioritise subjects and classes, thereby assigning 'weak' or problematic teachers to 'weak' or problematic classes. Unfortunately, personal observations as a parent, as a school administrator and as well as teacher educator have left this writer convinced that both the assumptions are wrong in varying proportions around this country. Expertise in the subject will also encompass expertise in the language, ways of expression and jargon of the subject. A teacher who is not a true specialist is going to be found wanting, and has to judiciously make the required effort to become competent.

When it comes to English, teachers can demonstrate an alarming lack of competence. Perhaps the system of teacher education discourages failures from the system, given a cost-effectiveness scenario based on initial investments and demand for teachers in schools. Surviving the system becomes easier if the English language student teachers do well in the other subjects, thereby scoring through aggregation. It is also likely that students who are better in English tend to be better at other subjects as well, and when given a choice, choose to become teachers only in the last resort. Hence, those who can't end up teaching English. English majors at the teacher education colleges (as exemplified by this writers experience of Maktab Perguruan Persekutuan, P. Pinang) and at university level (as in USM) have shown an alarming lack of awareness of their own linguistic shortcomings be it oral, spoken, written or in comprehending what they read. It is important therefore, that teachers constantly strive to maintain and improve the standard of their own abilities in English, and thus their linguistic literacy.

The second kind of literacy refers to what can be termed the teacher's coherence in life as an individual. By this I mean the general state of well being that we strive to achieve in life, seen in our daily disposition and general sense of harmony with the rest of life. The term 'life' I equate with the totality of people, events and nature that surround the individual teacher's environment. The teacher needs to be in harmony with the rest of life in order to come across as an inspiration to his children. It would, of course, be true that everyone will probably be found lacking in such harmony at different times and in varying levels of intensity. But the literate person attempts to give voice to his fears, frustrations, hopes, and joys, and in the process seek accommodation through the medium and mediation of language. The teacher needs to express and address the major issues of life and seek a balance with what can and cannot be resolved in life. In the process of such expression, the individual seeks meaning and linkage between self and the outer reality, and to some extent realizes what Freire (1972) called empowerment. Freire (1972) suggested that there is a need for dialogue, based on reflection and action, both mutually based on love. He suggested that 'the word' or the process of framing the thought in terms of language itself calls for positive action. The importance of such empowerment and self-harmony will be evident when we consider the damage that a disgruntled and unhappy teacher can cause to young children.

This process, however, does not come naturally to all. It in fact calls for knowledge of self, based upon knowledge of a language and a methodology for self-analysis. The concept of self-analysis, or of reflection is often an alien concept for most people. The growing market for motivation and self-development gurus suggests that this aspect does not come easily, and indeed has to be learnt. Most teacher education programmes that I know of do not deal with this important aspect, given the tremendous pressure on the institutions to complete pre-determined courses of

study. Where is there the time to think of self-analysis, accommodation of the self to surroundings, and self-understanding in order to succeed in life and the profession? In order that the teacher education institutions make provisions for such teacher development, there needs to be a professional approach to examining inner states of the student teachers, so that they can understand themselves, and make the decision as to whether they wish to change or not. It is therefore timely to ask what reflection is, and how it becomes relevant.

The third kind of literacy relates to the individual teacher's professional competence and development. Griffiths and Tann (1992) suggest that reflection is one of the recent approaches which provide a radical answer to the theory-practice division (i.e. that they are separate/mutually interdependent) by suggesting that "all action is an expression of theory (albeit, highly personal and implicit theory)" (p. 70). They propose, however, that such a division is false, because "what we still tend to label as 'theory' and 'practice' are more accurately seen as 'public' and 'personal' theories...to be viewed as lining, intertwining tendrils of knowledge which grow from and feed into practice" (1992, p. 71).

Approaches to reflection have varied depending on what the function of knowledge obtained either from research or practice is. If such knowledge is seen to be externally derived, then research findings are used in the belief that knowledge obtained from external sources can be useful not only in directing, but also controlling practice. Teachers thus model their practices in the belief that replicating the findings of empirical research findings is valid and effective in solving the problems of practice. On the other hand, such knowledge from research can be viewed as constituting merely one other source of knowing. Research findings can then be accepted as another acceptable source of knowledge for informing practice. Based upon careful consideration of existing options, teachers choose the best option in the light of possible consequences. Such an approach would essentially be eclectic, and aim for what would be best for students. Knowledge can also be viewed as being found in the domain of practice. Attempts to reconstruct experience arising from practice leads to new revelations. Such revelations may be about either the contexts of action, the teacher's self (in the cultural environment of teaching) or on certain assumptions about teaching that are taken for granted (such as the social, political and cultural assumptions embedded in the context of teaching). In these cases, knowledge is obtained from the context as well as personal experience, and acts to transform practice (Grimmett, 1988).

Smyth, 1984, suggests that when teachers adopt actually question their own practices, then they engage in a process of rendering problematic or questionable those aspects of teaching generally taken for granted,but then what can be described as problematic, because " the objects of our doubts might be accepted principles of good pedagogy, typical ways teachers respond to classroom management issues, customary beliefs about the relationship of schooling to society, or ordinary definitions of teacher authority - both in the classroom and the broader school context" (Tom,1985, p.37).

In other words, approaches that seek to problematise educational matters are trying to raise questions about issues that might otherwise be accepted as sound. What seems to be important then is how to conceptualise teaching. If teaching is viewed as being value-free and technical in nature, the reflective approach might focus on the teaching and learning process and knowledge of subject matter. If education is seen as something broader, reflection will be macro in nature, and concern itself with the ethical, moral and political dimensions of education (Smyth,1989b).

Reflection is an important aspect of what has been called an experiential learning approach. Two features of the model include the experience itself, and the reflective activity that is based on the experience. Experience in this context is described as "the total response of a person to a situation or event : what he or she thinks, feels, does and concludes at the time and immediately thereafter" (Boud, Keogh, and Walker, 1985b, p.18). Such an event or situation could be either formal (for example through lectures, field trips, and workshops) or informal, and may come about through an external or internal cause. It is during a phase of processing following experience that reflection occurs. Reflection in this case is "a form of response of the learner to experience" (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985b, p.18), and represents people trying to recapture their experience, thinking about it, mulling over it and evaluating it. In this approach, there is a constant interplay between behaviour, ideas and feelings, experience and reflection leading to new perspectives, understandings and action. While acknowledging their debt to John Dewey, Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985b) point out that their approach is different because it places greater emphasis on the affective aspects of learning. These affective aspects are important not only because they provide opportunities for enhancing reflection, but also because they provide barriers to reflection.

Schon (1983,1987,1988) has emphasised knowledge that is found in the artistic performance of skilled practitioners. Many skilled practitioners are able to reflect while in the midst of action and try out new solutions, instinctively as it were, based on their previous knowledge and experience. This involves a consideration of alternative modes of framing and reframing (Calderhead, 1987). Hayes and Ross (1989) define reflection as a "way of thinking about educational matters that involves the ability to make rational choices and to assume responsibility for those choices" (p.315). Reflection includes the recognition of educational dilemmas, responding to these dilemmas by recognising similarities and dissimilarities, framing and reframing the dilemma, mentally experimenting with the situation to discover consequences and implications of possible solutions, examining intended and unintended consequences and evaluating the solution by determining whether or not the consequences are desirable.

Wallace (1991) suggests that pre-service teachers come to professional education with existing conceptual schemata or mental constructs. Then, in the course of teacher education, they receive inputs of "received" knowledge and experiential knowledge. The interaction of these three elements in the context of practice leads to reflection and understanding. Practice and reflection form a reflective cycle, and lead to professional competence. Such an approach recognises an individual's previous knowledge and experience of the profession. Students bring at least twelve years of vocational observation and participation to professional education, and these include craft knowledge as well as conventional wisdom which amount to explicit behavioural tenets of the dominant prevailing ideology (Armaline and Hoover, 1989). Wallace (1991) points out that once enrolled on courses, students have inputs of received knowledge (the vocabulary of subjects, matching concepts, research findings and theories and skills) as well as experiential knowledge (knowledge-in-action, knowledge from observation and doing) which together provide for a cycle of practice and reflection leading to professional competence. The term 'received knowledge' is proposed as an alternative to Schon's reference to research-based theories and techniques (1983, p.58) not only because the student receives it rather than experiences it, but also because it is a deliberate echo of received wisdom or that which is commonly believed without proof or question. Furthermore, much of what students learn (like intonation patterns, and concepts such as a grammatical hierarchy and educational validity) are not necessarily all based on research. Experiential knowledge refers to professional experience acquired in the context of practice, and is closest to Schon's notion of knowing-in-action. However, for Wallace (1991), experiential knowledge could include knowledge-by-observation (p.15) of someone else's practice (in person or through video). Wallace (1991) refers to feelings, intentions and doubts that can arise in the course of doing things and suggests that it is normal for professionals to "reflect on their own professional performance, particularly when it goes especially well or particularly badly. They will probably ask themselves what went wrong, or why it went so well...what to avoid in future, what to repeat and so on" (p.13).

Wallace's (1991) approach is important in being specifically designed for the general training of foreign language teachers. It has been designed for those engaged in teacher education (especially in developing countries), as well as programmes for in-service, supervisory or inspection, advisory, managerial and personal development. In attempting to put ideas and suggestions within the broader context of a coherent framework for the approach to language teacher education, no attempt is made to prescribe the content of any specific approach to teacher education. The approach represents a collection of practical activities (based on the views and content presented in each section) with no prescription of correctness. This recognises that there is no single correct answer or solution to educational problems. Most activities remain open-ended, and chapters are characterised by sections entitled "personal review" which invite the readers to think about ideas and issues raised in each of these chapters. Reflection in this approach then represents deliberating over ideas that have been raised. In the process, received and experiential knowledge combine to inform on the idea or problem, thus leading to new understanding, and a reflective cycle.

Wubbels and Korthagen (1990) acknowledge the influence of reframing as the key to their interpretation of reflection as being the result of constant attempts to expand, refine and alter mental perceptions of reality. They follow a definition that "a person is reflecting when he or she is engaged in structuring his or her perception of a situation, of his or her actions or learning, or when...engaged in altering or adjusting these structures" (p. 32) as being the basis of a four year teacher education programme in the Netherlands. Richert (1990) suggests that "the time in the teaching process when teachers stop for a moment (or longer) to think about what has occurred to make sense of it in order to learn from their experiences in the classroom" (p.526) is reflection.

Given the above, the following section will discuss an agenda for further research. It is based on the view that there never is enough data on teaching and teachers, especially in contexts such as Malaysia.

SUB-AREAS OF RESEARCH:

There is little known about the core knowledge of practicing and student teachers in Malaysia. As teacher educators, we need to be guided by research on the basis of, and types of knowledge that teachers have and need. More important, we need to know how these kinds of knowledge affect their performance and development as teachers. We all have what can be called 'mental models' (Senge, 1991) or core values, over-riding metaphors. The implication is that we are comfortable when things fall into place in line with these. We are likely to fit things in line with these values. Senge (1991) suggests that we are likely to view things only in accordance with these mental models, and that these values over-ride all other mental states, and perhaps influence (if they do not control) the way we behave. Mitchell and Weber (1999) suggest that our subconscious preconceptions about education, including what we perceive to be the roles of teachers, teacher models, teaching styles and practices and ways of learning, all affect our own practices. What are these preconceptions, and how are they formed? The authors suggest that these are likely to be found in childhood experiences, observations of teaching, experience of any teaching practices, and even cultural ways of perception, such as images. For example, in a matriarchal culture such as that of Tamils, the mother is culturally seen as the silently suffering and self-sacrificing provider. The teacher in such a culture is equated to being above gods in meriting respect and thanks, and thus importance in the hierarchy suggested by the saying "matha (mother), pitha (father), guru (teacher) deivam (god)". Thus, the saying can be taken to mean love and respect your mother first, then your father, teacher and only finally the gods or divinity. Such cultural embedding of values is likely to build in an emotional relationship on the young, whereby mothers in particular may have a tremendous role in influencing personal values and directions for development in children.

Initial results from a survey of teacher beliefs and practices among 80 in-service English language teachers shows that 32 of them (or 40%) acknowledge that the greatest influence on their becoming teachers was their mothers, while 13 teachers (or 16.3%) were influenced by their fathers. The study dealt with a multiethnic and multilingual and multireligious group of teachers with varying levels of teaching experience, who were in the final year of a three year undergraduate English Language and Literature Studies programme at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. The responses from the group comprised 25 Malays (all Muslims) 10 Indians, 21 Chinese and 11 others, who saw themselves as members of Sarawak's indigenous races. The group included Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians and others. What is significant in this context is the influence that parents have on their children, to the extent of influencing choices of careers. It will need to be ascertained as to whether this kind of influence was instrumental for later career decisions from the time the respondents were young children, or whether parents continued to have significant influence even when these teachers were teenagers or even when they were young adults. Other tantalizing issues that come to mind in this context include the extent of such influences. What other areas of these teachers lives are influenced by their parents, and even other elders? How significant would these influences be? One can imagine the cumulative effect that predetermined view can hace on the whole educational structure of the nation if we assume the effect that these teachers will have on their own children and children taught at by them in the years to come. Bodycott (1997) in a study of Tamil, Chinese and Indian preservice teachers in Singapore supports the view that parents (and also the teachers that these teachers had spent significant time with while they were students themselves) significantly influence developing structures of self, self-esteem and appropriate behaviour. These are often the result of the learning culture and social environment, as well as language and adult behaviour.

While many schools of education will probably impart philosophies of education from a western perspective, such as from Dewey, little is known about what drives the local student and qualified teachers, and what their philosophies are, especially pertaining to the way they approach problems and challenges in life, and their philosophy pertaining to teaching. Given the reality of Malaysia's multilingual and multiethnic composition, there should be concerted effort at identifying the philosophies that underpin the approaches to teaching of, not only individuals, but also the various ethnic groups. What is their approach when faced with the unexpected, or when problems arise? Do they seek to work out solutions themselves, or do they seek solace and advice from external sources such as elders, or expert teachers? In fact, how do these teachers rate themselves on a scale from being very good to poor teachers? In other words, we need to assess teachers' self-esteem, the sources for such esteem or lack of it, and the qualities that they see as being essential to a description of good teaching.

The suggestion is that unless these values are addressed, understood, accommodated and made more open, teacher education is likely to fail with regard to its own goals. Teacher education has to be revamped to work with, and from an understanding of the major values that drive the student teachers.

It is argued that one very important type of literacy relates to professional knowledge about their profession, and the educational curriculum. Do teachers understand fully the implications and expectations of the curriculum? Do they engage in discussion and analysis of different and specific aspects of the curriculum, or do they generally ignore all of these and merely drift along with the daily routines of teaching? It has been pointed out that there needs to be reflection, and there have been numerous approaches to reflection and the development of reflective teachers. Two ways of engaging Iin the process of examining and understanding the curriculum are 'curriculum analysis' and 'curriculum development'. Curriculum analysis and curriculum development are ways in which the focus is on preparing reflective users and developers of the curriculum. Curriculum analysis may be targeted at either curricula developed by the student teachers themselves or those developed by others (Ross, 1990). In curriculum analysis, (as exemplified in projects at the University of Wisconsin), the aim is to increasingly sensitise students to values and assumptions embedded in specific curriculum materials and programmes, as well as the influences on curriculum development process in specific settings (Zeichner and Liston, 1987).

Curriculum development on the other hand, attempts to empower teachers by making them the decision makers with regard to curricular issues by their designing or adapting curricula, rather than become mere implementors of pre-designed instructional courses. For example, Goodman (1986a, 1986b) and Beyer (1984a, 1984b) describe restructured courses wherein students are taught specific approaches to curriculum design involving consideration of technical, educational and moral issues at each stage of the process. Original student contributions are required at each of these stages. Students then develop, teach and evaluate part of the curriculum as part of their field experience.

Where English language teachers are concerned, we need to understand their general competence in the language as pointed out earlier, but also their competence when it comes to methodology, and the general rationale of their approach. Are they aware of different methods, the limitations of each, ad possible adaptations of these depending on the context? Who do they consult when methodological problems arise? Do teachers bother to monitor the effectiveness of their lessons?

Such research therefore needs feedback from a number of perspectives. At the least, we need to view things from practising teachers, student teachers (both pre and in service), administrators, teacher educators and an often over-looked, but extremely valuable group, retired teachers. Input from all these sources will help fill in many gaps in our knowledge of the realities in teacher knowledge, practices and education. Future directions will only be on solid ground once the groundwork of getting this kind of feedback is maintained on an ongoing basis.

1.   LITERACY REGARDING PERSONAL (SELF) KNOWLEDGE

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY: what do the teachers believe in terms of teaching, and their own life-views. Is there any mainstream philosophical approach?

SELF KNOWLEDGE / ESTEEM: Do the teachers know themselves, their strengths, weaknesses and inclinations? At the same time, do they feel confident in themselves and have self-esteem?

AREAS OF COMPETENCE: what areas or skills are the teachers competent in?

SOURCE OF REFERENCES, ADVICE, SOLACE: in the event of problems, set-backs, lack of knowledge and so on, who do the teachers turn to?

2.   LITERACY REGARDING PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE: how well do the teachers know the subjects that they teach? Thus, do they know their grammar of English well, for example?

TEACHING (METHODOLOGY) COMPETENCE; in the area of pedagogy, what skills do they bring to teaching, and what kind of teaching methodology strengths do these provide?

APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING: are there any particular teaching approaches that they prefer when teaching, and are there able to explain why they choose any particular approaches?

SOURCE OF REFERENCE, MONITORING EFFECTIVENESS: how do these teachers check to see if they are doing a good job, or whether they are not doing well?

PROFESSIONAL EVALUATION AND ACTION: will the teachers seek professional guidance and advice in terms of their professional abilities, and will they allow others to evaluate how well they teach?

3.   ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

CRAFT KNOWLEDGE: do they know enough about the craft of being teachers of language and literature?

TEACHING GOALS: what exactly do they hope to achieve inn their teaching, and what od they see as valid goals for their students?

CONCEPTUALISING THE STORY: :what word would they use to describe what they do as teachers, and as a summary of the narration of their work?

RATIONALE

It is suggested that we all have what can be called 'mental models' (Senge, 1991) or core values, which can be seen as over-riding metaphors. The implication is that we are comfortable when things fall into place in line with these, and it is likely that we see ourselves as being in the right direction. On the other hand, teachers may well fit all things in line with these values. Thus, all actions are seen through the over-arching view of the metaphor, such as 'garden', or 'banking'. Teaching and all associated aspects become part of a garden that allows growth, or everything adds up in banking to provide a healthy bank account of knowledge. It is also likely to view things only in accordance with these metaphors. A more drastic version of this view is that these values over-ride all other mental states, and control the way we behave. One can well see how an over-riding view of teaching as stressful (battleground metaphor) can affect all issues associated with the profession. It is therefore argued that unless these values are addressed, understood, accommodated and made more open, teacher education is bound to fail with regard to its own goals. A weaker version of this hypothesis would be that teacher education would be failing to achieve full potential. As such, teacher education has to be revamped to work with, and from an understanding of the major values that drive the student teachers.

In order that Teacher education be informed and able to attend to these issues, research has to provide perspectives from :
                                        teachers themselves
                                        teacher educators
                                        teacher administrators.

Some essential questions would include:
        1. why are they teachers?
        2. what do they wish to achieve in their professional capacity?
        3. what are they professionally good at?
        4. what are their primary goals when teaching in the classrooms?

5. what words would they use to describe their professions, schools, colleagues, students, and school heads?

6. how good is their own command of English?

7. how good a teacher of English are they?

8. when teaching what is their greatest worry or focus?

9. do they plan their lessons?

10. do they try out new methods, and if so, how often?

11. could also raise questions pertaining to national goals, standards, practices, status, esteem, and remuneration.

Such research would benefit from multiple approaches, thus including quantitative surveys, as well as qualitative, including questionnaires, interviews, case studies and essays.

In conclusion, it is suggested that teacher education needs a broad approach to evaluation of the multifarious pulls that affect education, and furthermore, it needs to examine the different mental modes that frame teaching and teachers.

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