

Program Restructuring and Reconceptualizing Practice: An Epiphany

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I would like to believe that I would have reconceptualized my practice as a teacher educator without the catapult of a dramatically restructured teacher education program. In truth, living through a dramatic restructuring compelled me to focus on how I and my colleagues enact a pedagogy of teacher education. One of the most notable features of our restructured program was an extended fall practicum that began on the first day of the school year. When teacher candidates returned to the Faculty for two on-campus weeks midway through the fall semester, it quickly became apparent that traditional, transmission models of teaching were both inadequate and inappropriate. Teaching experience-rich preservice teachers would require us to develop a new pedagogy of teacher education (Loughran, 2006). Thus began my journey to reconceptualize my practice, to enact new pedagogical strategies and to reconsider and reframe my goals and purposes.

In this paper, I identify notable markers along the way and particular challenges that I confronted and continue to confront, such as provoking candidates to question their assumptions about teaching and learning and working to induce conceptual change. I have had to learn how to listen harder and to hear better the voices of all of the stakeholders in the becoming-a-teacher enterprise, including teachers and administrators as well as our candidates. Putting theory into practice has taught me to attend far more closely to the voices of teacher candidates, to honour their perspectives and experiences, to challenge their beliefs and values, and to work to thread these more openly into the fabric of the teacher education classroom. It has also taught me that this is an intensely important and demanding enterprise.

Program Reform and Restructuring

Teacher education reform is a complex business. Cole and Knowles (1998, p. 18) highlight some of the “overwhelming volume of conflicting, confusing analyses of the condition of teacher and general education, and subsequent proposals and programs for achieving

reforms.” These include appraisals, such as Zeichner and Liston’s (1991), that identify four traditions tied to reform efforts: academic, social efficiency, developmentalist, and social reconstructionist. Other assessments focus on teacher education curriculum as the cornerstone of reform efforts: Knowles and Cole (1996) emphasize the personal and sociocultural aspects of teaching and the systemic pressures imposed by the university milieu, Giroux and McLaren (1986) approach curriculum through critical analysis, while the Holmes Group (1995) promotes concentrating on specific areas of educational knowledge and skills. Another approach to reform centres on preservice program structure and supports extending the practicum component so that candidates spend more time in schools (Knowles & Cole, 1996; Upitis, 2000) or anchoring the entire program on site within schools rather than within the university (Wilmore, 1996). Yet another thrust to calls for reform considers the calibre of prospective teachers, requisite selection criteria, and program length (Darling-Hammond, 1997; 2000).

The 1997-1998 academic year saw the full implementation of a dramatically restructured preservice teacher education program at the Faculty of Education of Queen’s University at Kingston. In the preceding year, 60 teacher candidates had volunteered to participate in a pilot program for an all-encompassing reform endeavour. Not merely were all of the curriculum courses overhauled, but the methods courses were entirely redrawn and new courses were introduced, including two compulsory field-based courses—Critical Issues: Equity and Exceptionality, and Theory and Professional Practice. Further, the practicum component of the program was completely recast; and the entire structure of the academic year was reconfigured. Embedded within this reform initiative was what our then dean described as the possibility for a “new model for teacher education” (Upitis, 2000b, p. 9). It was a heady time. There was anticipation and excitement, as well as trepidation and, not surprisingly, considerable resistance.

Noteworthy among features of the restructured program was an extended 14-week fall practicum that began on the first day of the school year. This was preceded by an intensive orientation week in August immediately prior to the practicum. Teacher candidates were placed in Associate Schools, typically in cohorts of 5 to 12, with a Faculty Liaison assigned to the Associate School for support and supervision. This required a significant commitment on the part of the school, as candidates would continue at the same Associate School for each of their required practicum periods, including the extended 14-week fall practicum and a 3-week practicum in the winter. What would change were their Associate Teachers. Halfway through the fall semester, candidates returned to the Faculty for 2 weeks of classes and then returned to their Associate Schools. The majority of their campus-based courses occurred in the winter term, along with two other shorter, 3-week practicum placements, one in their Associate School and another, an Alternate Practicum, in a setting that could offer a view of education different from that seen within their Associate School classrooms. The Alternate Practicum was tied to a full year, on-campus Program Focus course that allowed for more in-depth exploration of an area of personal interest (for faculty as well as candidates), such as exceptional learners.

Irony and Paradox

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) provide a thoughtful and concise set of Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study. They use Frye's (1957) discussion of the four heroic modes and suggest that the ironic hero story is particularly apt as a narrative form for teacher educators because it "allows a focus on the failed, the difficult, and the problematic and does not require the tragic end or the heroic romantic return" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 18). Moving into full-time teaching at the Faculty in 1997-1998, having successfully taught—or so end-of-term course evaluations indicated—a variety of courses on a part-time basis, including foundations and methods courses, I blithely assumed that I could continue

teaching as I had been teaching and as I had been taught, what Russell (2000) calls “default” teaching strategies. But the catapult was launched in August of that year and my real journey as a teacher educator began.

Using Schön’s (1987) account of the paradox of learning a new competence, Bullough, Knowles, and Crow (1992) draw attention to the daunting problem of the beginning teacher:

The paradox . . . is this: that a student cannot at first understand what he needs to learn, can only learn it by educating himself through self-discovery, and can only educate himself by beginning to do what he does not yet understand. (Schön, 1987, p. 85)

The consequence is that new teachers are highly “vulnerable to criticism and to feelings of failure; and even the best educated and most able and emotionally secure . . . face moments of frustration and self-doubt” (Bullough et al., p. 79). The paradox is further sharpened and deepened “as at every turn the beginning teacher is reminded in various and powerful ways by students, other teachers, and by small private and personal disappointments, of what she cannot do or does not understand” (p. 79). This sense of vulnerability, inadequacy, and inability is equally applicable to teacher educators confronted with the challenges of a radically altered preservice B.Ed. program.

When candidates returned to the Faculty for 2 weeks, I was forced to confront my growing awareness and ever-increasing discomfiture that I had no real idea how to proceed in my teaching. The on-campus weeks had been designed to thread field experiences with coursework and to work towards unpacking and contextualizing dilemmas of practice. Because candidates had already experienced 4 to 6 weeks of practicum work, it was self-evident that they needed opportunities to debrief those experiences. My dilemma was how to ensure that they would also receive sufficient content to complement and buttress those in-

school experiences. Alas, my interpretation of content at that time was more in keeping with Kessels and Korthagen's (1999) description of *epistemic* knowledge, "Theory" with a capital T, rather than on *phronesis* or "theory with a small t" (see also Korthagen & Kessels, 1996). They suggest that *phronesis* is knowledge that is more *perceptual* than conceptual because it is situation-specific and tied to the context where a problem is met or a need or concern arises. Thus the responsibility of the teacher educator is to heighten student teachers' perceptions to focus "the attention of the actor in the situation on certain characteristics of the situation, characteristics important to the question of how to act in the situation" (p. 7).

I had had no personal teaching experience of a "field-based" course and I naively thought that its *modus operandi* should parallel more traditional teaching. How to begin to tease out how candidates understood their practicum experiences and how those understandings should propel on-campus classes was a conundrum at best and a black hole at worst. I had not yet reached the point where I could trust my "knowing-in-action," what Schön (1983, p. 50) sees as one of the hallmarks of competent professionals, where the knowing is tacit, implicit in the action, and interactive with both action and outcome. Consequently, I was tentative when it came to actively negotiating content with candidates and aggressively soliciting topics that were most relevant and responsive to their needs and concerns.

In a series of focus groups conducted with elementary and secondary candidates at the conclusion of that 1997-1998 academic year, the first year of full implementation of the restructured program, the on-campus weeks met with vigorous protest. Candidates questioned their purpose and saw them as "a waste of time." The hoped-for opportunities to connect theory and practice did not appear to happen for them. They found that in "every single class, we talked about our experiences . . . for the first week." In the second week, they were frustrated by the absence of structure where "almost every class was . . . decide your own

agenda for this class or decide a topic or choose from these topics.” I appreciated that theory and practice should not be bifurcated, but I simply did not know how to orchestrate that delicate balance where theory and practice are carefully and thoughtfully interwoven such that each informs the other. A major pillar of the restructured program was, and continues to be, learning from experience, congruent with Dewey (1938), Schön (1983), and Lave and Wenger (1991). I can vividly recall some of my most able candidates saying that theory was all well and good and could be interesting, but asking how it really connected with their teaching in the schools. What they were asking for were applications, strategies, and particular ways to address the myriad challenges they were encountering in the schools. And what I struggled with was how to enable their learning from experience while contending with trying to learn from my own. Nothing in all my teaching experiences with children, adolescents, and adults had prepared me for the necessary kind and degree of reframing in thinking and in practice.

Recently I began reading the memoir of literary scholar Jane Tompkins (1996), entitled *A Life in School*. It is a rich exploration of her school history, from P.S. 98 in New York City through graduate school at Yale and on into the academic world. Her description of teaching as an “ego-battering enterprise” resonated for me:

Teaching, by its very nature, exposes the self to myriad forms of criticism and rejection, as well as to emulation and flattery and love. Day after day, teachers are up there, on display; no matter how good they are, it’s impossible not to get shot down.
(p. 90)

For Tompkins, good teaching consisted of “brilliant ideas about the subject matter [because] this was the model I have been given, and it was what I tried to live up to” (p. 90). Similarly, Russell (2000) describes “frames” for the process of learning to teach as well established, “not just in the minds of those learning to teach but also in the minds of experienced teachers

and faculty who teach those who are learning to teach” (p. 239). As I reconsider and re-evaluate, it was my desire to produce “brilliant ideas about the subject” that was preeminent. After all, brilliance could protect against the slings and arrows of a student question that challenged, or even exposed, any cracks in one’s knowledge base. Because I presumed that I knew more Theory, I could dazzle with that and shore up candidates’ lesser store of “pure” knowledge. Korthagen and Kessels (1999) rather neatly skewer teacher educators for their *a priori* choices about what theory should be told. They contend that inherent to choosing and telling theory is the prevalent, traditional conception that there is a gap that needs to be bridged between theory and practice. But “it was the a priori choice that created this gap in the first place” (p. 6). Culpability is always hard to shoulder.

Learning to Listen

I had the good fortune to be involved in the initial evaluation process of our restructured program as a facilitator for focus groups conducted with elementary and secondary teacher candidates. This experience provided an opportunity to begin to understand the reform experience through the voices of teacher candidates. Ironically, those who are centre stage in the process of becoming a teacher and who have so much to offer about its attendant challenges, complexities, and the quality of their preservice preparation often receive the least attention. Cook-Sather (2002) argues that students’ perspectives must be authorized. She contends that if students are indeed actively engaged in their own knowledge construction then their voices must be heard to provoke a “conceptualization of teaching, learning, and the ways we study them as more collaborative processes” (p. 3). These focus groups taught me a great deal about candidates’ commitment, passion, beliefs, and frustrations, as they also provided insights into where we were falling considerably short. They also underscored that dramatic program reform was far more difficult than anticipated. Had I not had the experience of facilitating these groups, I seriously question whether feedback from course

evaluations would ever have been sufficient to propel the kinds of changes that I had to make if I were to begin to address Sarason's (1996, 1998, 2002) concern about creating contexts for productive learning. "The differences between contexts of productive and unproductive learning is the basic starting point which will allow us to see what we call our educational system in a more realistic way" (Sarason, 2002, p. 236). More pointedly, Sarason (2004) contends,

Unless, and until, on the basis of careful studies and credible evidence we gain clarity and consensus of the distinguishing features of classroom contexts of productive and unproductive learning, the improvement of schooling and its outcomes is doomed.

The history of reform efforts is testimony to the recognition that the bulk of American classrooms are contexts of unproductive learning, and the diverse efforts of reform had to have the goal of making them productive. They failed because they were not clear about what they meant by *productive*, *unproductive*, and *learning*. (pp. 1-2, emphasis in original)

Sarason's (2002) notion of contexts of productive and unproductive learning provides a vantage point to see more clearly how embedded learning is and must be in context and how closely every teacher must attend to it.

One of the most important criteria of a context of productive learning: *wanting* to learn but not because learning is externally demanded. In the restaurant business they say success depends on three things: location, location, location. In schools the three things are context, context, and context. If you do not know the context, your explanation or judgment of what you see or what has been reported can be misleading or wrong. (p. 184)

A refrain that echoed throughout the 1997-1998 preservice focus groups was, "Give us stuff, not fluff!" "Stuff" was not limited to resources per se but included expectations to be

engaged in a rigorous exploration of the learning-to-teach process. Candidates spoke tellingly of their realization that teaching carries with it both power and responsibility, “We need to be asking, ‘How dare you teach?’ . . . that needs to be asked more often because it IS such a powerful position (1998, Secondary). They spoke of their deep respect for the profession and, consequently, “for what it is we want to get out of [their program]” (1998, Secondary). Hence their concern for rigour: “You don’t slap the assignments so that you can say the program is rigorous. You slap the assignments so that there is value to the program” (1998, Secondary). And they asked for respect and the chance to speak with a critical voice. Not surprisingly, they praised their practicum experiences as the most valuable component of their program “for the practicum is the only setting in which they can experience firsthand the delights, challenges and frustrations of life at the front of a classroom (Russell, 2004, p. 1).

And so I began my descent into the “swampy lowland” and those methods of inquiry that are not exempt from experience, trial and error, intuition, and muddling (Schön, 1983, p. 43). Schön’s oft-quoted description of the landscape of practice resonated,

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing “messes” incapable of technical solution. The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground, however great their technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or to the larger society, while in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern. (p. 42)

Cochran-Smith (2005) describes the “reciprocal, recursive, and symbiotic relationships of scholarship in teaching education as ‘working the dialectic’” (p. 219). (See also Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004). To do so requires an emphasis on the “blurring rather than dividing of analysis and action, inquiry and experience, theorizing and doing in teacher education” (Cochran-Smith, p. 219), all are reminders of the swampy lowlands. The line of inquiry that

focused on giving voice to teacher candidates and learning to listen to their perceptions and representations has continued to develop and to be provocative and fruitful (see Martin & Russell, 2005). Of note, the initial broad organizational inquiry into the restructured preservice program and the series of program evaluation studies that it yielded virtually ended after the 1997-1998 academic year, once full implementation was underway.

Perspectives

Goodlad (1991) raises what might be a “chicken and egg” dilemma when he asks, “What comes first, good schools or good teacher education programs?” (p. 1). Lest we flounder, he quickly answers, “Both must come together. The long-term solution—unfortunately, there is no quick one—is to renew the two together . . . as equal partners in the simultaneous renewal of schooling and the education of educators (pp. 1-2). In an effort to spur partnership, schools that accepted our candidates for placements would be called Associate Schools and would be accepting a cohort or school group, rather than one or two individuals. This meant that Associate Teachers within a school could confer about their roles and responsibilities, rather than working in isolation to mentor candidates. And candidates would similarly have the support of their peers. As public acknowledgment of their participation, these schools would be given a Queen’s banner to display in their entrance hallway. The linchpin between the Faculty of Education and the Associate School was the Faculty Liaison, who usually was assigned to a cluster of schools. The liaison was responsible for supervising candidates, communicating with Associate Teachers and the school administration, and teaching one of the field-based courses, Theory and Professional Practice. Because of the length of the extended practicum, far more was demanded of the participating teachers. Cultivating and maintaining relationships was both more difficult and more important than it had been in the old program (Upitis, 2000a).

Numerous stakeholders were consulted prior to and during the pilot year and the first year of full implementation. These included school administrators, teachers, community members, federation representatives, and teacher educator colleagues outside of our Faculty. Following Hatch (1998) who suggests that the reform process is more complex when various stakeholders are consulted, our dean was clear that “it was a necessary process, for we sensed that if the reform was to be successful, resultant changes would have to be tailored to the unique features of the institution and supported by the larger community” (Upitis, 2000a, p. 52). Because willing involvement of teachers in schools was crucial to the success of the reformed program, focus groups with elementary and secondary teachers and administrators were conducted during the planning stages with the intent of discovering concerns and working to address or redress them. These consultative groups provided such rich data that the same approach was used as part of the loosely coupled evaluations of the pilot year and the first year of full implementation (see Martin, Hutchinson, & Whitehead, 1999; Martin, Munby, & Hutchinson, 2000). In 1997-1998, in addition to facilitating focus groups with candidates, I conducted focus group interviews with administrators and field practitioners and subsequently analyzed those data sets. Recounting the full range of findings is beyond the scope of this paper; but a brief synopsis points towards the critical importance of understanding varying perspectives and incorporating that understanding into one’s teaching and learning.

A predominant message throughout this set of focus group data was a desire for partnership between the schools and the Faculty. Teachers and administrators valued the infusion of energetic candidates into their schools, and there was considerable support for the extended practicum since “teaching is a marathon” and being a “sprint runner for a couple of weeks” is not adequate preparation for the marathon. Participants spelled out the price of partnership pragmatically. They wanted faculty who would supervise candidates to be visible

and to communicate regularly with them. They were concerned about criteria for assessing candidates over the course of the extended practicum placements, about how and when candidates' teaching responsibilities should be structured, about their own increased workload and additional responsibilities, and about in-school coordination given the size of the in-school groups. They predicted that without decided attention to implementation issues, many problems would arise. And so they did. Partnership was possible but far more daunting to achieve than we had thought. A secondary administrator's succinct assessment was representative: "The whole thing was a great plus to candidates, a plus to the school as a whole. It wasn't a plus to the individual associate teachers" (Martin, Munby, & Hutchinson, 2000, p. 285). Overall, the field-based courses were poorly understood as "an infringement," as was the purpose of school group meetings that took candidates away from the classroom: "I don't have a good idea as to what they were doing, and when they're at the school we *should*."

Participants had many recommendations for tackling the pragmatics that they identified including open and continuous communication between the Associate Schools and the Faculty and changes to the structure of the extended practicum so candidates could experience the start-up of school, return to the Faculty to learn "the groundwork" and then go back to the schools. The field asked for recognition of their contribution to the profession as they struggled to meet the demands of the restructured program, "I felt like I *gave* a lot more than I got back." Teachers were torn by their professional responsibilities to their students and to their teacher candidates, but "my job, first and foremost, is for my students."

I found these data sets compelling and the process of data analysis reinforced my commitment to let the data speak if the voices of the participants were to be heard. I learned that one must be vigilant and remember that there are multiple perspectives and ways of seeing. I was reminded how deeply one becomes immersed in one's own community of

practice and how great the divide between communities can be. A secondary principal spoke of the two cultures, the “ivory tower and the practical tower”:

We’ve got a long way to go to make the most of both of those in a much more connective kind of way, where the practitioners in the school have a bit more time and a bit more respect for the theoretical, and those who are engaged in the theoretical have a little more respect of knowledge from the actual, practical world. (Martin, Munby, & Hutchinson, 2000, p. 295)

I realized that there are points of divergence that cannot be well negotiated nor should they be. Our principal responsibility is teacher education and our primary commitment is to our prospective teachers. For our colleagues in the schools, their principal commitment is to the learning of the students in their classrooms, followed by their commitment to the profession and to those who are becoming teachers. Notwithstanding, concerted attention must be directed towards each community of practice having “a bit more time and a bit more respect” for the other.

Giving credence to the authority of experience (Munby & Russell, 1994), I began to introduce specifically the notion of perspective into my courses and to work to have candidates consider the classroom dynamic from multiple points of view. As I thought harder about my own students’ perspectives, I became more aware of the need to problematize what I was trying to do and introduced up-front statements of purpose. How could I expect my students to buy into what I was doing if they were unaware of why I was doing it? Consequently some of us who taught the Professional Issues course developed a list of discussion topics to guide the school-group meetings that took place at the Associate Schools. Candidates could then share the topics with their Associate Teachers. I started explaining why they needed to tell their Associate Teachers what they were doing in their school groups as well as what their assignments were for the Critical Issues course. By extension, if

associate teachers were unaware of the purpose and content of school-group meetings, how could they ever sanction, let alone support, candidates' time away from the classroom. When I subsequently became a Faculty Liaison and began teaching the other field-based course, Theory and Professional Development, I took to heart the recommendations from the field, in particular regarding more ongoing and open lines of communication, and have worked to incorporate them.

Beliefs and Values

The underlying rationale for the two field-based courses, Theory and Professional Development and Professional Issues: Equity and Exceptionality, built on the need to have contextualized experiences before abstractions from or about those experiences could occur (Upitis, 2000a). During the extended practicum, candidates were allotted three hours per week to work collaboratively in their school groups on course-related tasks. Candidates used their in-school experiences to begin to develop a critical stance, to address equity issues like gender, social class, cultural diversity and to learn to understand the population of students with exceptionalities and necessary curricular adaptations, accommodations, and interventions. Additional topics for their school-group discussions included classroom management, board policies and procedures, and the overall school community.

Teaching the Professional Issues course made me realize that if candidates were going to develop a critical stance, then they needed to move beyond their assumptions about students' abilities, attitudes, or performance, assumptions that could be delimiting and ultimately not supportive of individual students' needs and abilities. But to do so meant challenging their beliefs and values and presenting opportunities for them to re-present their own school experiences in light of their often-contrasting practicum experiences. Secondary candidates (2000) spoke tellingly about learning how "eye-opening" it was to learn "different priorities" from their students who were not university or college bound. In contrast to their

own experiences, candidates came to the realization that a “university degree [may not be] the best education;” therefore they needed to respect and address “other options” to prepare their students as “lifelong learners.” As elementary candidates confronted challenges in their classrooms, they, too, found it to be eye-opening, “We’re dealing with kids that are carrying weapons, and kids that will laugh in your face and swear at you, and call you names...I was totally unprepared for it” (Elementary, 2000).

If candidates were going to be able to confront their “taken-for-granted” assumptions, they needed to first identify what those were. And for that to happen, they had to feel safe enough to risk feeling vulnerable and exposed. The Professional Issues: Equity and Exceptionality course was required for all preservice candidates and there was a prescribed set of topics. Many of these topics were emotionally laden, sometimes leaving candidates unsettled and distressed. I slowly began to understand that it had to be their issues, their challenges, their questions, and their dilemmas of practice that drove the course. I could set the topics; however, how they played out had to be contingent upon and in concert with candidates’ own experiences. By giving credence to those, a context could be created that validated the authority of their experience (see Munby & Russell, 1994, for an explication of the concept of “authority of experience” and its preeminent role in an epistemology of practice). Acknowledging and validating candidates’ practicum experiences with their attendant challenges and dilemmas meant that sufficient dissonance could be generated to spur conceptual change.

The focus group data revealed how much candidates’ beliefs about learning-to-teach changed, “I learned the most by doing...I don’t think anyone can really teach you how to *teach*. That’s what I was expecting when I came here. Someone’s going to teach me how to teach. But that’s not how it works” (1998, Secondary). Participants in these focus groups acknowledged the complexity of learning-to-teach as they recognized that “There is no

process or equation that you can plug factors into and get the right answer... You learn by *doing*. Often, you learn by doing wrong, and you need that forum, that opportunity to do wrong”(1998, Secondary, in Martin & Russell, 2005, p. 16). So, too, did I learn from experience, learn by doing, and learn by doing wrong. Perhaps most importantly, I came to realize that I had to step back. Although I knew that I could and should provide direction, I had to relinquish control. Tompkins (1996) makes the case that teachers need to “let go” and relinquish authority if a class is going to get to know itself.

People’s personalities won’t be visible, their feelings and opinions won’t surface, unless the teacher gets out of the way on a regular basis....To get out of the students’ way, the teacher has to learn how to get out of her own way. To not let her ego call the shots all the time. This is incredibly difficult. (p. 147)

Well described in the literature (e.g. Britzman, 1991; Bullough, Jr., Knowles, & Crow, 1992; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Grossman, 1990; Huberman, 1993) is the trajectory of teaching, beginning with the necessarily egotistic survival phase where the focus is on oneself and delivering the curriculum, moving to a burgeoning awareness to look beyond oneself to *see* the students and their varying needs and abilities, and progressing to a full-fledged understanding of the critical importance of not only understanding one’s students but wholeheartedly working to engage them and enable their ownership of their learning. But until I got out of the way and truly made room for their critical questions, concerns, and issues, it was sheer hubris to assume that engagement and ownership were remotely possible in any meaningful way and that any transformative learning could take place.

Contexts of Productive and Unproductive Learning

Sarason (2002) contends that if teachers are to create contexts of productive learning, then of “bedrock importance” is the need to stimulate and support “a student’s wanting to learn, to learn more, willingly to experience how such wanting takes him or her to domains of

knowledge and actions that had been understandably so, not in the ken of the student” (p. 186). He describes wanting to learn as “a door opener to heretofore unknown worlds” and charges the teacher to light “that kind of fire with the hope that it will rage and spread” (p. 186). Not leaving the reader in the lurch, Sarason goes on to frame some of the additional requirements for “that kind of fire” to flare. Foremost are knowing, appreciating, and respecting one’s students since “school learning—whether adequate, inadequate, or worse—is never independent of the personal and cognitive history of students” (p. 217). For Sarason, a context of productive learning must be motivating; and if what is being learned is productive, then it will become self-sustaining over the short and long term. But “teachers teach under pressure, and kids learn under that pressure. We know it and they know it” (p. 209). Where he lays blame is, however, not with teachers but with those who prepare teachers, arguing that becoming teachers are socialized into a school culture that supports conformity and belies confrontation. Within Faculties of Education, little is done to dispel the hyperbole in the usual rhetoric that is espoused:

Each child is a distinctive individual, each child can learn, the mission of the school is to help the individual fully realize his or her potential. It does not take long at all for that would-be teacher to understand that rhetoric is one thing, acting consistently with it is quite another thing, much like the difference between *your* fantasy and *your* reality” (p. 189).

The central issue here is not the impossibility of the teacher’s task but avoiding or indirectly addressing how to approximate the goal: “It is not sinful to fall short of the mark, it is sinful not to have a mark. There is a difference between compromising your beliefs and caving in to the easy way out” (p. 190).

The following excerpts from the focus group data (Martin & Russell, 2005) reveal how absent were opportunities for candidates to deconstruct the rhetoric and to have a forum

for their questions, “teachers need to know *how* to communicate with their students, and never has anyone brought up communication” (1998, Secondary). More pointedly, an elementary candidate (2000) lamented there were no opportunities to address whether, “in an inner city setting, . . . do you spend your time teaching the provinces of Canada or how to say please and thank you?” Without opportunities to consider broad-based education issues and principles of practice, they saw the program as “disjointed” with “no continuity.” They were left feeling “herded through” because there was no “common ground, something that’s bringing it together and having a focus” (1998, Secondary). “Knowing how to teach curriculum” was presented with “no handle on the history,” no consideration of “political stance” or challenge of the status quo (2000, Elementary). Candidates asked where was the discourse that addressed substantive questions like, “What do we mean by education?” and “Who is education really for?” (2000, Elementary). Without “framed discussion [of] things that transcend curriculum—like pedagogy, learning styles, assessment, evaluation” (1998, Elementary), they felt ill prepared. They wanted help to integrate and consolidate their practicum experiences with their coursework, “The closer I get to the end, the less I feel I’ve learned about the fundamentals that I’m going to build my program on, and that’s . . . scary” (2000, Elementary). These data were sobering as they too clearly exposed the three counts where we and I fell short: (1) in creating contexts of productive learning, (2) in disentangling the conceptual and instrumental differences between contexts of unproductive and productive learning, and (3) in reconsidering and re-presenting practicum experiences, using contexts of productive or unproductive learning as frames.

Teaching as a Moral Act

As I revisit the focus group data sets, I am struck by the intensity of feeling that resonates throughout, whether it is data from the field or from teacher candidates. There is praise, but there is certainly protest as well. The discrepancy between our views, as teacher educators, of

the restructured program and those of candidates, associate teachers, and administrators reveal how complex teacher education is and how challenging systemic change is (Martin, Munby, & Hutchinson, 2000; Martin & Russell, 2005). Context again is preeminent as no reform movement occurs in a vacuum. Reform movements are both reactive and visionary: reactive in their perception of an unsatisfactory state that requires change and visionary in their perception of a more desirable state (Sarason, 2002, p. 245). Not surprisingly, they can generate intense support and equally intense dissent, and this intensity requires at least some consideration of teaching as a moral act. Moral responsibility shapes teachers' beliefs and values, drives their pedagogy, and ultimately goes some way towards a determination of their actions as worthy and their teaching as valued.

Although the notion of the "moral dimensions of teaching" is inherently complex and defies any clear or simple answer, the moral is simply "everywhere" (Sanger, 2001, p. 683). Fenstermacher (1984) is helpful in teasing apart "good" teaching into a moral force and an epistemological force. Morally, "good teaching" asks what principles justify teaching actions that, in turn, could evoke principled action by students. Epistemologically, "good teaching" asks if there is a rational defense to what is being taught and whether there will be attendant value for students by contributing to their knowledge, beliefs, or understanding. Thus teaching as a moral act has several requirements. These include: (1) identification of moral precepts or "moral goods" (Fenstermacher, 2001, p. 640) such as respect, honesty, fairness, truthfulness, courage, compassion, and generosity); (2) consideration of the warrants for teaching actions; and (3) some sense of whether teaching actions could or would engender moral actions on the part of students. The epistemology of "good teaching" queries both declarative and procedural knowledge, asking whether there is intrinsic value in that knowledge such that students will benefit.

Unpacking the moral and epistemic aspects of “good teaching” is insufficient without considering teaching actions. Again, Fenstermacher (1984) is helpful. Using the notion of manner, he argues that teaching extends well beyond subject matter knowledge and requires a manner that is liberating. Such a manner can serve as a model for students. Such a manner can also represent a liberal education that can free the mind to see dogma, convention, and stereotype, thereby providing the capacity for students to make sense of and contribute to their world. Although Fenstermacher (1984) initially introduced “manner” to develop a more robust conception of teaching where manner would contrast with method, he later significantly altered his position. Drawing “attention away from method, directing it instead to manner, led to a far too rigid division between the two. It now appears that method is an extremely important means for fostering manner in students” (2001, p. 640).

This interplay between manner and method, what could be considered a moral dynamic, contextualizes candidates’ assessment of their professors and the relevance of their coursework. The professors who were passionate, engaging, and modeled good practice were valued. “These professors were not about *‘the answer’* but instead ‘developed the questions with us...and sometimes you don’t leave the classroom with an answer, but maybe more questions, and that’s leading you towards finding the answer” (2000, Secondary) (Martin & Russell, 2005, p. 19). Those who did not “genuinely care about what they’re doing and really [don’t] want to prepare you for next year...wiped out...everything that we learn [about] what a good teacher is and how [to] create a positive learning environment” (2000, Secondary) (Martin & Russell, 2005, p. 19).

Many of the tensions inherent in teaching are driven by moral considerations and moral judgments. These considerations and judgments become an ongoing part of teachers’ lives and go some way towards shaping their professional identity. Unless they can be played out in a context where becoming teachers can confront and wrestle with them, teacher

educators will sell candidates short and will certainly compromise their own moral responsibility.

Conclusion

In what I consider to be one of the best images of the ill-structured domain of teaching, McDonald (1992, p. 1) describes “real teaching” as happening “inside a wild triangle of relations—among teacher, students, subject—and the points of this triangle shift continuously.”

Yet, out of the uncertainty, craft emerges. The wildness of the triangle provokes it....I craft a workable relationship for the moment [with my students]...I tune my stance continually to the values that seize me. Similarly, though I remain chronically unsure of what to teach and how to teach it, I develop an eye for productive linkage....[But] I can never be sure of the moves I must continually dare to make; the relations of teaching remain always skittish. (pp. 1-2)

I had to learn how to live with the skittishness in a very different way. I had to learn how to appreciate “back talk” on multiple levels and learn how to learn from experience and credit the authority of the experience. I had to learn how to learn from working the dialectic of research and teaching. I had to learn how to “let go” and trust the process itself. And, of course, what I now think of as my epiphany continues as a work always in-progress.

These realizations are hard won, the changes in my thinking and in my practice always accompanied by a sense of uncertainty and not inconsiderable angst. But if I am going to walk my talk and create contexts for productive learning, then my beliefs about the need for a community of learners with a shared sense of purpose, who will embrace challenge and accept risk, must be translated into practice. I need to be vigilant, so I continue to listen hard and, I hope, well and honourably to candidates’ voices. I need to continue to ensure that multiple perspectives are also understood and credited. In so doing, I need to expose fully and

unabashedly my passion for wanting to learn, for wanting my candidates to learn, and for wanting those whom they will teach to learn—well beyond their ken. Finally, as I enact new pedagogical strategies for teacher education, I need to continually question my assumptions, beliefs, and values, always acknowledging the essential tensions of teaching and respecting that teaching is indeed a moral act.

Acknowledgement

This paper is an extended version of a chapter (Martin, 2007) in a book that explores and illustrates practical implications of positions developed by Loughran (2006).

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