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'BEING A TEACHER': DEVELOPING TEACHER IDENTITY AND ENHANCING PRACTICE THROUGH METACOGNITIVE AND REFLECTIVE LEARNING PROCESSES

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Abstract

The discourse of reflection is now firmly embedded in a range of teacher education programs in Australia and overseas. Reflective frameworks have been used by teacher educators to offset the perennial emphasis on technically prescriptive interpretations of 'being a teacher'. Whilst these undoubtedly contribute to the personal 'meaning making' of neophyte teachers, particularly in relation to practical classroom experiences, there remains significant scope to integrate a more concerted reflective approach throughout other elements of the teacher education endeavour. When the language of reflection is applied only in a cursory or superficial way in the

teacher education context the opportunity to acknowledge, nurture and challenge the developing identity of the teacher is limited. The critically important question of 'Who am I?' is subsumed by an emphasis on 'What do I have to do?' In establishing an identity as a teaching professional it is critical that teacher education students come to understand their identity as a lifelong learner and consequently, their own values, attitudes and beliefs as learners. This paper provides an exemplar of one teacher education initiative that attempts to integrate both the skills and identity agendas through a metacognitive and reflective practice approach.

The paper begins with a brief discussion of some important contextual issues concerning teacher education in Australia with particular reference to debates emerging from various reviews in relation to the most effective approaches to preparing teachers for the challenges and demands of the profession. The paper then provides an overview of a unit in the first year Bachelor of Education (Primary) program at Southern Cross University in NSW, Australia, which seeks to simultaneously immerse the students in the practical 'know-how' of teaching whilst facilitating learning concerned with their developing identity as teachers. The pedagogy underpinning the unit provides for considerable emphasis on metacognitive and reflective learning strategies which aim to challenge and enhance constructs concerned with 'being a teacher'. The paper explores the rationale for such an approach and draws on data from the unit evaluations in providing an insight into the efficacy of the approach.

Introduction

There is little doubt that the role of the teacher has changed significantly in recent years along with the status of teaching as a profession and the demands and expectations the community places on teachers and schools (Vick, 1998; Groundwater-Smith, Cusworth & Dobbins, 1998). Such changes have been the subject of a long series of reports spanning the past two decades (Gonczi, 2001). These reports have been driven by a number of political and practical agendas, not the least of

which is the imperative to arrest the declining status of teaching and to pursue ways of attracting and retaining committed and talented teachers. Irrespective of the plethora of recommendations that typically result from such reviews and inquiries, a significant concern that emerges is a lack of understanding or agreement about what is the best approach to the initial and ongoing formation of teachers. A recent report by Ramsey (2000) concedes that 'many of the issues which need to be addressed are long-standing and complex' (p. 25). However, in reflecting on the very limited impact of past reviews, he questions why those with responsibility to transform teacher education and the quality of teaching did not meet the challenges and why, when so many issues were highlighted, so few were addressed. What is not made explicit in such an analysis is that teaching and teacher education continue to be areas of contestation between stakeholders with frequently competing interests. More recently, a report by Esson, Johnson & Vinson (2002) in NSW has highlighted significant concerns with the retention of experienced teachers and their availability to mentor beginning teachers. Key issues cited in this review were teacher stress and burnout. Esson et al (2002) emphasise the critical importance of professional development and ongoing opportunities for learning for teachers as a way of counteracting the issues facing the profession. A range of initiatives to address the concerns raised in the above reports continue to be the subject of debate and discussion.

The environment described above suggests that teacher educators in Australia will need to focus with increasing seriousness on what kind of teachers are needed and what approach to learning in their initial teacher education will best facilitate the desired outcomes. Indeed, in reviewing various approaches to teacher education it appears that there is one basic question driving the work of teacher educators and educational researchers' work: 'What do teachers need to know?' (Cole & Knowles, 2000). Efforts to answer this question have seen the emergence not only of a wide range of specialised and alternative approaches to teacher education in Australia and overseas but also a proliferation of debates about what constitutes professional knowledge, how this is best developed and by whom. Most teacher education courses incorporate three major elements - general education involving liberal arts type courses, methods and foundations courses and field based experiences.Whilst Zeichner and Gore (1990) claim these elements individually and collectively shape teachers' knowing in particular ways, Fullan (1991) makes the point that there is little evidence about the impact of such components. Though not suggesting that initial teacher education is ineffective Fullan (1991) does makes the point that the quality of program experiences varies greatly and that further investigations need to be undertaken to identify the 'particular characteristics of programs that might make a difference' (p.295).

Research to date on the nature and practices of teacher education indicates it is a somewhat conservative enterprise (for example, Smith & Zantiotis, 1989; Carr & Kemmis; 1983; Hursh, 1992; Grundy & Hatton, 1995; Groundwater-Smith, Cusworth & Dobbins, 1998). However, as previously signalled, the changing role of teachers, together with the increased demands and expectations placed upon them, will significantly influence the types of knowledge/s teachers require in their undergraduate education and ongoing professional development. It would seem that the process of becoming (and staying) a teacher is increasingly being acknowledged as a multi-faceted process which involves the person intellectually, socially, morally, emotionally and aesthetically (Beattie, 1995). In such a context, continuing learning, both structured and self-directed, is critical to professional practice. Such an understanding has significant implications for the approach to learning adopted by

teacher educators. Herein lies a significant tension. Much of the language of recent reviews reflects discourses about 'training', incorporating strategies such as benchmarked competencies and teacher standards, rather than exploring the complexity of 'being a teacher' in the 21st century. In the process, it would seem, the language of 'learning' is relegated to the margins of the debate. For example, the recent *Report of the Review of Teacher Education in NSW* (Ramsey, 2000) questioned strongly current arrangements in regard to practical experience for student teachers:

> Compared with other professions, student teachers spend minimal amounts of time in schools and other educational settings. What they do there is of doubtful value…If in the past universities and schools worked in partnership to prepare teachers, the connections between them are now difficult to identify…Rather than the word 'practicum' the term 'professional experience' is proposed. This expression better captures the idea that the student teacher will be involved actively in the professional work of teaching over longer periods of time as part of their preparation program and will develop experience throughout their teaching years… (Ramsey, 2000, p. 10)

From Ramsey's perspective it would seem the answer to the 'problem' of teacher quality is really quite simple - place student teachers in classrooms for more extensive periods of time and they will know what they need to know and learn what they need to do to be an effective teacher. Clearly, such 'solutions' are linked to particular utilitarian ideologies that reinforce the discourse of practicality that has long been evident in teacher education. Whilst there is arguably some merit in approaches which immerse student teachers in the reality of the classroom, Ramsey's approach is a clear example of what Down and Hogan (2000, p.16) refer to as 'ways in which student teachers' professional identities are increasingly being shaped and regulated by modern corporate workplace culture'. This debate is not new. Sixteen years ago Beyer (1987, p.21) argued that the dominant discourse of technical rationality resulted in a particular perspective where 'techniques of teaching often become ends in themselves rather than a means to some reasoned educational purpose'. More recently, Carson (1997, p.80) highlighted the dilemma posed by student teachers' perceptions that their 'lack' (not yet being regarded as a teacher) will be filled by learning the 'tricks of the trade' in the classroom of an experienced teacher.

Whilst the 'on-the-job' component of teacher education provided by the professional experience placement can potentially make a significant contribution to the development of the teacher it nevertheless has a number of well-documented encumbrances. For example, Day (1995, p.135) noted that student teachers 'who compromise and adapt to school culture do so, in a sense, unconsciously and in all innocence'. Furthermore, a study in New Zealand by Waghorn and Stevens (1996) would seem to suggest that 'student teachers usually comply with the status quo and carry out actions and routines preferred by their supervising teachers' (p.50). Put this together with the findings of Grundy and Hatton (1995, p.2) who suggest that the 'ideologies of teacher educators highlight a lack of concern for social transformation' and there appears to be reasonable grounds to continue to be reflexive about approaches to teacher education that lead to narrow constructions of 'being a teacher'. Bullough & Gitlin (1991, p.38) highlight the limiting effects of the technical discourse of teaching-as-method when they argue that it:

> Maintains a set of structures and embodies a cluster of ideologies which encourage the following: a constricted view of teacher intellect through emphasis on teaching as technique, an extreme form of individualism, teacher dependence on experts, acceptance of hierarchy, a consumer or 'banking' view of teaching

and learning (teacher is 'banker'; learning is consuming), a limited commitment to the betterment of the educational community and a conservative survivalist mentality among novice teachers.

Few teacher educators can escape this debate. In our own experience, a course review of the Bachelor of Education program in 2001 highlighted the need to ensure students undertaking the program developed their capacities as learners as well as teachers. Concerns around learning were very much being flagged from a utilitarian perspective and targeted issues such as 'literacy skills', 'study skills' and 'computer skills'. As the designated unit developers for the proposed new first semester unit, ubiquitously titled *Introduction to Teaching*, we had a number of concerns about the way that the unit was being conceptualised. We responded by conveying concern that the teaching of such skills outside the context of *learning how to learn* would not foster a self-directed or self-regulated approach that would challenge and nurture the identity of the developing teacher. In this way, we were proposing that *Introduction to Teaching* should be constructed around the somewhat existential premise of prompting students to engage with what it *means* to be a teacher. This approach echoes Feldman's (2002) calls for teacher educators to assist their students to understand what 'being a teacher' means to them, including reaching understandings of their own actions, intentions and beliefs. It also incorporates elements of Carson's (1997) work, which elevates the significance of teacher identity. The metacognitive approach used in this unit is consistent with that proposed by de la Harpe & Radloff (1999) who suggest that future teachers need to be effective learners and also effective teachers of learning.

Introduction to Teaching: An Overview and Rationale

Introduction to Teaching provides first year undergraduate students with an insight into what it means to be a teacher whilst exploring the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they will require throughout their teaching careers. As the developers of *Introduction to Teaching* we shared a belief based on previous research and practice (Graham, 1996; 2002; Phelps, 2002) that reflection and metacognitive learning processes were constitutive of life-long learning, which we perceived as central to effective teaching practice. The unit has as its central organising principle the notion of 'being a teacher' and lays out a number of conceptual elements associated with teacher identity that the students are given the scope to engage with and make meaning from. Underpinning these conceptual elements is the discourse of teacher as reflective practitioner and life-long learner. The students are immersed in content and assessment activities that require their engagement in reflective practice. The unit is conceptualised in the following diagram.

The above diagram is somewhat limited in that it cannot convey the dynamic interactions between the various

components of the unit nor the links to other units the students study as part of their teacher education program. In particular, the diagram does not make visible the ways in which *Introduction to Teaching* attempts to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions concerning a dichotomous conceptualisation of theory and practice. These limitations are addressed through the unpacking of the various elements of the model and the utilisation of the model to 'map' both the content of the unit and the structure of the Bachelor of Education program more generally.

The unit draws upon a framework espoused by Carr and Kemmis (1986) where theory and practice are inextricably linked throughout the learning endeavour. Whilst the first eight weeks of the unit focus on encompassing important elements of teacher identity and the remaining weeks are contextualised in terms of teaching skills and observations in classrooms, the teaching and learning processes engaged throughout the unit resist attempts to polarise theory and practice. Debates about a theory-practice gap that separates the real world of teaching from the 'ivory tower' of the university (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p.9) were not considered particularly helpful in nurturing a reflexive approach in neophyte teachers.

The unit involves the students attending lectures and workshops, undertaking observations in classrooms, engaging in technology learning in computer laboratories, writing a reflective essay, keeping a journal and commencing a learning portfolio. Whilst the emphasis in the current discussion is not so much on *what* the students learn in the unit but on *how* they learn, it may be useful nevertheless to outline the breadth of student learning objectives. In undertaking the unit students learn to:

- reflect critically on the implications of 'being a teacher';
- analyse their attitude and approach towards their learning in both university and school sites;
- acknowledge the social, political and cultural contexts of the profession in which they are (and will) be working;
- evaluate effective teaching and learning through structured observation and experience;
- reflect on their practice;
- critique taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning;
- adopt critical approaches to information literacy;
- cultivate collaborative approaches to learning and teaching;
- nurture their self-esteem;
- set realistic learning goals and manage their time;
- use the university library and database searching skills;
- write essays and reference at an approved university level.

The Significance of Metacognitive Processes

Introduction to Teaching takes a metacognitive approach to learning, which is significant, both in terms of its relevance for teacher education generally and for the particular learning needs of first year undergraduate students. Metacognition refers to knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes, and the active monitoring and consequent regulation of these processes in the pursuit of goals or objectives (Flavell, 1976; Flavell, Miller & Miller, 1993). *Introduction to Teaching* is informed by a number of theorists' work related to metacognition, including that of Biggs (1985) who adopts the term 'metalearning' to refer to students' awareness of their learning and control over their strategy selection and deployment. The unit takes into account

Biggs (1988) notion that students need to be aware of their motives, task demands and their own cognitive resources to exert control over learning (and teaching) strategies used. In particular, the unit draws on Biggs (1988) research which indicates the value of a metacognitive approach in facilitating self-directed learning and his assertion that student learning may be enhanced in three ways - discouraging a surface approach, encouraging a deep approach and developing an achieving approach. As academics with considerable experience of the learning needs of first year students, we were convinced of the merit of such an approach.

Introduction to Teaching encompasses content and processes that have an emphasis on developing self-regulated learners. Such an approach is consistent with the work on metacognition proposed by Zimmerman et al. (1986; 1994; 1996; 1994). Self-regulation is the process whereby 'students activate and sustain cognitions, behaviours and affects, which are systematically oriented toward attainment of their goals' (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994, p.309). Zimmerman proposes a model of self-regulated learning involving three interrelated components: metacognition, motivation and behaviour. *Metacognitively*, self-regulated learners are people who plan, organise, self-instruct, self-monitor and self-evaluate at various stages of the learning process. *Motivationally*, self-regulated learners perceive themselves as competent, self-efficacious, and autonomous. *Behaviourally*, self-regulated learners select, structure and create environments that optimise learning. Self-regulation also involves students' deliberate use of higher level strategies to direct and control their concentration on academic tasks (Corno, 1994). Each of these processes is considered critical in the development of capable and effective teachers (de la Harpe & Radloff, 1999).

Given this belief in the value of a self-regulated approach, *Introduction to Teaching* incorporates an emphasis on elements such as time management, practice, mastery of learning methods, goal-directedness, help seeking and a sense of self-efficacy. These aspects are all presented within the context of 'what it means to be a teacher'. For example, the Unit was required to incorporate a computer literacy skills component, providing foundational computer skills to enable students to function effectively in the University environment. This component was presented to the Unit developers as a seemingly incongruent 'tack on' to an already content heavy unit. Rather than present the computer skills in isolation from the Unit's content they were instead approached as an integral aspect of the 'learning to learn' and lifelong learning agenda. Consistent with approaches refined in other research contexts (Phelps, 2002; Phelps and Ellis 2002a, 2002b, 2002c) an emphasis was placed on this computer learning being the beginning of a life-long learning journey necessitated by continual technological change. The focus of the computer lab sessions was primarily on learning process and strategy, including exploratory learning, peer-group learning, problem-solving and help-seeking. These were all strategies seen as critical to ongoing computer capability (Phelps, 2001; 2002b). The computer skills presented were integrated with the Unit's weekly coverage of the conceptual elements of 'being a teacher'. For instance, Web searching skills were developed within the context of 'understanding and working in a school system', with students required to conduct a Webhunt for information on a range of educational departments, authorities, and groups. In learning to participate in discussion groups, students were required to contribute a reflective response to the question 'what do you see as the role of the teacher of a first-year computer lab course for pre-service teachers?' In this computer laboratory context, learning computer skills required for university study took on new significance for the students as they adopted and reflected upon aspects of

'being a teacher' and the importance of goal setting, problem solving, self-instruction, peer mentoring, self-evaluation and lifelong computer learning as an integral part of 'being a teacher'.

Zimmerman's (1996) reference to the potential 'empowerment' of metacognitive processes couldn't be more apt for teachers in the current educational environment. When one reviews the range of issues and concerns emanating from reports such as Ramsey (2000) and Esson et al (2002) it is not difficult to extrapolate why there is a need to foster a self-regulated approach to learning for teachers. If Esson et al (2002) are accurate in their assessment that many teachers experience the launch of their career as a 'baptism by fire' then teacher education programs *must* tread the difficult path of strengthening the identity of the teacher whilst assisting them to develop in their craft. Immersing students in a metacognitive approach early in their teacher education program holds potential to empower students as active participants in their own learning, thus enabling them to develop an approach to their learning that could benefit their teaching from the outset of their careers. This is particularly critical for future teachers who are then better placed to support self-regulated learning in their own classrooms. Such a strategy is supported by the work of Milter (1999) who suggests that 'adults who have experienced this (experiential) approach to learning *from the start* might not be bogged down trying to unlearn the process methods of passive learning before joining in as active participant in the learning process' (emphasis added).

The Challenge of Incorporating a Reflective Approach

Integral to the metacognitive approach underpinning the unit is an emphasis on reflection and the development of reflective practice. Reflection, used well, can potentially position the developing teacher to be able to continually reconstruct his/her professional knowledge in response to the changing imperatives, demands and expectations of 'being a teacher'. Whilst it is widely acknowledged that the discourse of reflection already permeates many teacher education endeavours it is nevertheless important to note Hewitson's (1996, p.1) caution that '*information* about reflective practice is not to be confused with the *experience* of reflective practice. The map is not the territory' (emphasis added). Whilst the language of reflection is readily articulated in teacher education circles, particularly in regard to reflecting on classroom experiences and the development of teaching skills, the process of actually *doing* reflection for the purpose of self-conscious understanding of oneself as a teacher is neither readily embraced nor pursued.

In *Introduction to Teaching*, 'reflection' is positioned as the lens through which 'being a teacher' is understood, developed and practised. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for what they learn and the decisions they make in relation to their future development and shaping as a teacher. The students are required to keep a journal as a repository for this learning. Whilst the use of journals is anything but new in teacher education the emphasis in these journals is very much on learning the skills of reflection as distinct from documenting observations and actions. The transition is not smooth. Many students struggle to learn at the level of experience – they baulk at accessing assumptions, beliefs, values and attitudes that underpin action.

Given this to be the case, incorporating a stronger emphasis on reflection in a core unit at the 'front end' of a teacher education program can be risky. In part, this is because it acknowledges that teachers' personal beliefs, perceptions and experiences exert a greater influence on professional decision making than does knowledge (Watts, 2000; Pajares, 1992). We were mindful of the risks involved and the tensions and resistances that were

likely to emerge both from some students and some fellow teacher educators, as the result of the decision not to take a competency approach to what 'being a teacher' means. Despite these concerns, the ideas presented by Holm and Stephenson (1994) further assisted us in shaping the rationale for the strongly reflective approach taken in unit. In summary, we perceived that the reflective approach would:

7. Acknowledge the undergraduate teacher as an individual who retains some control over their developing identity of 'being a teacher';
8. Enhance their repertoire of professional knowledge by facilitating self-directed learning;
9. Enable them to make a conscious attempt to identify and study what is happening in classrooms (and elsewhere) and to learn from that;
10. Allow them to view education from different perspectives;
11. Require them to identify and address their own particular learning needs;
12. Facilitate self-analysis and self-evaluation of effectiveness in various situations and encourage personal and professional development through change;
13. Foster responsibility and accountability;
14. Encourage the developing teacher to dismantle dualist notions of theory and practice so they can draw on both in a more praxis-oriented approach.

For the purposes of the unit 'reflection' was taken to mean 'the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective' (Boyd & Fales cited in Palmer, Burns & Bulman, 1994, p.13). Implied in this definition is that reflection is an intensely personal experience. Herein lies the first major challenge. Some students find reflection an uncomfortable process. They resist integrating the affective and metacognitive elements of learning, preferring to work only in the cognitive domain which they find less challenging. Down & Hogan (2000) have written of the contradictions, tensions and dilemmas that are faced when we attempt to promote more critical and reflective thinking in teacher education programs. In our own experience these have emerged as comments and questions like:

4. *But why do I have to reflect?*
5. *I don't know how to do it.*
6. *I don't understand what my assumptions and beliefs have to do with teaching.*
7. *I thought it was the teacher's job to identify what I need to improve upon, not mine.*

(Comments recorded on lecturer's class notes)

Such comments are consistent with the issues raised by Saylor (cited in Palmer, Burns & Bulman 1994, p.5-6):

Another thing about reflection – it's hard. It's hard because one must analyse what's transpired and to some degree, make a value judgement about it. And if the reflection is honest, it can mean that I may have to alter my style or completely chuck something that I have worked hard to develop. It seems to be much safer and secure not to reflect, because I don't have to change that which I don't see as wrong.

While some students have difficulty acknowledging the discomfort and challenge that reflection entails, others are able to articulate and 'reflect through' their initial discomfort and concerns, as illustrated in the following journal extracts of students completing *Introduction to Teaching*:

The personal courage it takes to genuinely see yourself can be daunting. We have the capacity to invest heavily in denying certain things to ourselves, to protect and/or sustain our egos…Any challenges to these possibly long-held personal beliefs are challenges to our fundamental sense of who we are.

Reflection can be hard work. It isn't necessarily an 'improvement' process. It can involve an entire deconstruction of self and the journey of reconstruction.

The reflective process isn't easy. To be honest with oneself and face one's weaknesses is fearful and confronting. It can be a reality check to the ego! This process isn't going to be embraced by everyone.

I think that some people might resist a reflective approach as they do not want to look too deeply at their emotions as they might not like what they find – they may find their actions were not as 'perfect' as they would like to believe themselves to be…and are resistant to change.

The insights provided by these students support the view of Eby (1997) that reflective thinking is 'not something that occurs easily for most of us and it takes time to develop' (p.10).

It is important therefore that teacher educators remain acutely sensitive to the differences each student brings to the learning experience because these can potentially manifest as resistance to learning. Many have not reflected on assumptions, beliefs and values and struggle to articulate these. Others have markedly different capacities for exploring and being curious about what they know or don't know, can or can't become in relation to 'being a teacher'. Some students arrive at University with a great deal of self-awareness and self-knowledge whilst for others this will be a significant hurdle to their learning in this particular unit.

The benefits of reflection in underpinning a metacognitive approach to developing teacher identity are well illustrated by a number of students who made the connection between reflection, learning and a deeper understanding of 'being a teacher':

> *This unit has provided me with the opportunity to consider qualities that I want to build on and develop and also look at the challenges of teaching.*
>
> *I believe that the skills I have learnt in developing myself as a reflective learner have prompted me to become closer and closer to the status of 'great teacher'…We may adopt and mould certain aspects of another teachers' strategies with our own, but we must not lose our own identity by solely using their ideas.*

These students appear to have embraced the notion that 'reflective practice is more than just thoughtful practice, it is the process of turning thoughtful practice into a potential learning situation' (Jarvis,1992, p.176). Jarvis also claims that reflective practice is a key tool used by professionals as they face new and different situations and challenges. Some students acknowledged the value they perceived this to be for their future work as teachers:

> *To realise these goals I just need to keep applying myself, stay motivated, be a self-directed learner, reflect, manage my time,*

listen, observe, discuss and remember 'I can do this'!

Such comments lend weight to the view that reflection can lead to changes in future processing and increased metacognitive knowledge about learning – a key element for teachers:

As a powerful link between thought and action, reflection can supply information about outcomes and the effectiveness of selected strategies, thus making it possible for a learner to gain strategy knowledge from specific learning activities… Whereas metacognitive knowledge might be regarded as the "static" knowledge one has accumulated regarding task, self and strategy variables… reflection is believed to be a more active process of exploring and discovering (Ertmer & Newby, 1996, p. 14)

To go down this road can be difficult – not the least because it requires a degree of introspection and the contesting and re-shaping of taken for granted assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, practices and ways of knowing by all those involved. However, it would seem to be integral to the continuing process of 'being a teacher' where learning to teach and teaching to learn are inextricably linked, a point not lost on students engaged in the reflective process:

The range of emotions I experienced/am experiencing – feelings of being overwhelmed, inspired, anxious, challenged – are useful to remember to empathise with any person new to a situation, such as a new student at school.

To be quite honest, at one stage I was getting a bit fed up with reflection, reflection, reflection. But I have to say that I think if I do practise this type of reflection – take time to ask what, why, how, to evaluate (honestly!) and to analyse and reach a conclusion - it is a form of empowerment. I can take charge of my mistakes and overcome them in the future, I can congratulate myself on a job well done and, at times, I can reassure myself that I have done the right thing, even if others have criticised me.

In concluding the journal entries for this semester I find myself remembering the importance of reflection. Throughout the semester I have developed skills, strategies and self-worth that has altered the way I conduct myself professionally and personally. I find myself developing into a better, bigger, more tolerant and diplomatic person. I have come to define my beliefs, goals and ideals in manageable and just ways.

Undergraduate teachers who have refined their skills in reflection have essentially 'learned how to learn' and can potentially develop into what Ertmer and Newby (1996) refer to as 'expert learners'.

Developing the Teacher as an 'Expert Learner'

In taking the metacognitive and reflective approach described above in the development of the *Introduction to Teaching* unit there was an explicit and concerted commitment to position future teachers to begin to construct themselves as 'expert learners'. Ertmer and Newby (1996) extended Zimmerman's notion of self-regulated learning in their discussion of 'expert learners', a concept which incorporates reflection as a key element. Ertmer and Newby suggest that 'expert learners use the knowledge they have gained of themselves as learners, of task requirements, and of specific strategy use to deliberately select, control and monitor strategies needed to achieve desired learning goals' (p.1). In other words, they are aware of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they do or do not possess, and use appropriate strategies to actively implement or acquire them. 'Expert' learners are thus self-directed and goal oriented. Ertmer & Newby (1996, p.6) further point out that:

Expert learners notice when they are not learning and thus are likely to seek a strategic remedy when faced with learning difficulties… Novice learners, on the other hand, rarely reflect on their own performance and seldom evaluate or adjust their cognitive functioning to meet changing task demands or to correct unsuccessful performances.

Taking this view, first year students (many of who appear to be novice learners when it comes to tackling new and challenging tasks) can now begin to use reflection as the link between knowledge and control of the learning process. As Ertmer & Newby point out, 'By employing reflective thinking skills to evaluate the results of one's own learning efforts, awareness of effective learning strategies can be increased and ways to use these strategies in other learning situations can be understood' (p.1). 'Being a teacher' means being an expert learner not the least because teaching involves the capacity to monitor and self-regulate the learning process to enable decisions about what knowledge is required in particular contexts, along with how, when, where and why particular strategies are actioned.

Misguided notions that teacher education can prepare teachers with a range of contingency strategies for the issues and challenges they will face throughout their career simply can't be sustained. Many of the situations they will encounter have not yet even come into view. However, taking as a point of departure the idea that teachers might begin their careers as 'expert learners' is worthy of further experiment and investigation. In the current context of rapid change, expert learners' metacognitive strategies provide distinct advantages: 'When asked to deal with novel situations, the specific cognitive skills and learning strategies we have available become more critical than the limited content knowledge we may possess' (Ertmer & Newby, 1996, p.7).

The implications of taking up this discourse of teacher as 'expert learner' are significant not the least because it contrasts so strongly with the discourse of practicality and its emphasis on 'training' teachers as signalled in an earlier section of this paper. Whilst there is little argument with the imperative of ensuring the undergraduate teacher is developing in the practical skills of teaching, it seems critically important that teacher education endeavours, including assessment and reporting processes, acknowledge that teaching is more than skill. Where and how does the current system of assessing the undergraduate teacher measure (or even mention!) performance in relation to the complex processes of problem-solving, decision-making, collaboration, critical thinking and creative practice that today's teacher *must* acquire. It is entirely incongruent that the process of learning to 'be a teacher' gets reduced to passing tests. As Kenway et al (1995) point out, albeit in a different context, there is immense value in novice teachers developing higher order thinking, real understanding, situated expertise, the ability to 'learn to learn' and to solve problems at the edge of their expertise. Utilitarian approaches to teacher education won't provide this. Additional extensive periods of time in classrooms, in itself, won't either. As Carson (1997, p.85) suggests, 'Taking up teaching as part of one's personal identity involves gaining experience while negotiating a multiplicity of authoritative discourses of teaching'. A metacognitive and reflective practice approach, whilst in itself an authoritative discourse open to critique, was considered worthy of pursuing with first year undergraduate teachers at Southern Cross University as a way of fostering a more critically self-conscious understanding of 'being a teacher'.

There is little doubt that a continued commitment to the approach to teacher education outlined in this paper will require ongoing investigation and documented evidence as to its efficacy, particularly over time. Notwithstanding

this acknowledgment, the approach has significant implications for teacher educators. It requires strong partnership between universities, schools and professional bodies to continue to effectively challenge and re-shape possibilities for 'being a teacher' into the future. For those of us involved in the partnership of teacher education we may need to continue to negotiate the tension between commitment to learning through informed reflective practice and the largely conservative discourses which still shape our work .

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