‘PRACTICE’: FOREGROUNDING THE STUDY OF TEACHING IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Effective teacher education, the focus of this book, is something that can be understood and judged from several different points of view – but even stakeholders with real investment in effective teacher education find it difficult to agree on what effective teacher education actually is. Over the last three decades in Australia, for instance, there have been over 100 reports from state and national inquiries into teacher education (Hartsuyker 2007), yet still the ‘problem’ of teacher education remains a matter of public and government concern (NSWDEC 2013). As preparation for the teaching profession, effective teacher education is often described as a process that makes new teachers ‘ready’ for the classroom:

For too often, school principals and experienced teachers, employing authorities, parent representatives and new teachers, and even some school students, reported that new teachers were not ‘teacher ready’. Put simply, many new graduates seem to lack practical teaching skills, as opposed to the theoretical foundations required to be an effective teacher. (Victorian Parliament 2005)

This chapter argues that recent and well-founded developments in practice theory, and attention to professional practice as a research area (Kemmis & Smith, 2008; Grossman et al., 2008; Grossman et al., 2009; Green, 2009), might usefully resource a focus on the study of teaching as a core practice of initial teacher education. I want to make careful distinctions between some of the key concepts discussed in current theories of practice, and problematise taken-for-granted understandings of practice in our everyday talk and writing. The chapter considers the basic ideas needed for an orientation of assessment towards future needs and it discusses the development of a particular form of teacher education practice – Study of Teaching – a co-curricular program involving pre-service teachers working alongside members of the profession, more experienced students, and teacher education academics. The program is designed to provide space and opportunity for university-based pre-service teachers to develop the core practices they will need as beginners in the workplace practice setting of a school or early childhood service. This chapter reflects on the conceptual basis of this approach and identifies key points of focus in creating such an environment for developing practice.

FOREGROUNDING PRACTICE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Green (2009:2) claims that “practice is one of the least theorised concepts that circulate in professional discourse”, and for initial teacher education this seems particularly true. As teachers and teacher educators, we use the noun ‘practice’ quite indiscriminately: we shorten it (in an etymologically inappropriate way) to ‘prac’ and take it for granted, and we qualify it with any of a range of adjectives so that ‘teaching’ practice, ‘classroom’ practice, ‘professional’ practice, ‘reflective’ practice, or ‘best’ practice are seldom interrogated for what they mean and how they relate to
each other – or to the range of other meanings that practice can have. Consider reversing or transposing some of these formulations: ‘practice teaching’, for instance is not the same thing as ‘teaching practice’, and in its verb form, ‘to practise teaching’, is something altogether different from ‘to teach practice’. I argue here that to teach practice is the work of teacher educators, and that teaching the practice of teaching requires us to consider teaching as both a significant object of study, and an important subject of inquiry. Teacher education should provide the opportunity for students to study teaching, in order to prepare them to teach. To conceptualise the work of the student teacher, therefore, as the study of teaching in its full sense, is what I have elsewhere (Reid 2011) claimed can be characterised as a ‘practice turn’ for teacher education.

In Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach, Britzman (2003) highlighted the way that much teacher education in the present looks and feels very much like the teacher education of the past. She criticised what she described as “anachronistic and inadequate approaches to teacher education” (Britzman, 2003:45) that echo and repeat “the familiar curricular pattern of orientation courses, subject matter courses, theory courses, observation courses and practice teaching assignments [that are] a conglomeration of precepts and practices inherited from the more limited environment of a former day” (Britzman, 2003:45). In this description she was quoting a critique made in 1935. And twenty years earlier again, John Dewey (1916/1966: 170) wrote that: "... nothing has brought pedagogical theory into greater disrepute than the belief that it is identified with handing out to teachers recipes and models to be followed in teaching". And this is a critique that still applies in the Australian context, where a standardised form of teacher education can seen as “… locked into a ‘grammar’ of possibility and intelligibility such that it remains focused on a generic ‘one-size fits-all’, largely inflexible program, regardless of locational and other differences” (Green & Reid 2004:258).

Britzman (1991) has also claimed that the practice of initial teacher education is not helped by the existence of a “dominant belief that teachers ‘make’ themselves”. She argues that this is a “cultural myth” that “functions to devalue any meaningful attempt to make relevant teacher education, educational theory, and the social process of acknowledging the values and interests one brings to and constructs because of the educational encounter” (Britzman 1991:230). The belief that learning to teach is ‘natural’ is also challenged by Grossman (1991), and Ball and Forzani (2009), who claim there is nothing ‘natural’ about teaching, that it is professional, specialised work which involves teachers taking on a particular identity or role position; an over-determined attention to others and to particular forms and structures of thought and information; and that it requires them to do this through forms of interaction that are based on simultaneous communication with more than one other person. As they argue:

This work is not natural. To listen to and watch others as closely as is required to probe their ideas carefully and to identify key understandings and misunderstandings, for example, requires closer attention to others than most individuals routinely accord to colleagues, friends, or even family members. To provoke discordant thinking or errors in logic and argument intentionally would seem odd if not downright irritating in many situations. And, few adults seek to learn about others’ experiences and perspectives as systematically as teachers must. (Ball & Forzani 2009:499)
As I have noted elsewhere (Pietsch et al. 2011), it is what Lortie (1975) called the ‘apprenticeship of observation’ undertaken by school students over time, year after year, as they watch teachers work in classrooms, that is responsible for many of the preconceptions that teachers are ‘born’ rather than ‘made’. Unlike pre-service professionals in other fields, such as law or speech therapy, for example, pre-service teachers already know what the everyday practice of teaching looks like, and sounds like, before they enter teacher education. Lortie, like Britzman, saw this as the source of ongoing conservatism in the teaching profession, because this naturalised practice can only really imitate already-existing practices that have been observed, again and again, as a member of a classroom audience. As Lortie (1975) noted, an apprenticeship of observation fails to provide students with access to the teacher’s thinking, planning and problem solving ‘behind the scenes’. But it does mean that observational knowledge about teaching becomes internalised as ‘body knowledge’ about what teaching is, and what a teacher does, and often emerges, apparently ‘naturally’, when new teachers are caught unprepared, anxious or stressed in their workplaces.

The tendency to ‘revert to what we know works’, to teach the way we were taught, remains an obstacle for teachers, and often precludes the take up of pedagogical reforms or innovative teaching approaches, even when these have been taught in their pre-service teacher education. Pedagogical ideas that might look and sound different from the vernacular knowledge that student teachers bring with them into teacher education often are seen as ‘theory’ – difficult to turn into ‘practice’ in the classroom because they have not been practised in the teacher education experience.

There are several theories of practice that support the idea of a ‘practice turn’ in teacher education (Reid 2011). Those that are of most interest and help for thinking about the teaching of teaching are related to how people learn to do the sorts of thing that teaching is – an embodied (Bourdieu 1977, 2005), performative (Butler 2004), situated (Schatzki, 1996, 2002; Kemmis 2009); iterative (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1990, 2005) practice that works on the mind and the body to constitute and position (Foucault 1972) teachers as certain sorts of social subjects (Green 2009). As teacher educators, we must therefore acknowledge that what we do in our practice operates on (and with) the mind and the body. It is in essence “a practice producing subjects” – and is “crucially concerned with the initial and continuing formation of ‘teaching subjects’, or of teachers as knowledgeable and capable educational agents” (Green & Reid 2008: 20). With this as a premise, we must therefore start to work more consciously with the assumption that “[p]ractice is always embodied (and situated) – it is what particular people do, in a particular place and time, and it contributes to the formation of their identities as people of a particular kind, and their agency and sense of agency” (Kemmis, 2009, p. 23).

It is this body of practice theory that allows us to see the importance of conceptualising a ‘practice turn’ in relation to what Aldrich (2006) characterises as three major models of teacher education that have shaped the field historically: the ‘apprenticeship’ model, the ‘training’ model, and the model of teacher education as ‘disciplinary study’. Moore’s (2004) description of the resulting conceptualisations of ‘the good teacher’, where good teachers are seen as being ‘charismatic subjects’ who were ‘born to teach’; ‘competent craftspersons’, who emerge from good training, or ‘reflective practitioners’, who are disciplined and thoughtful in their work. In the
USA, Zeichner (2006) describes three different organising views of teaching expertise and teacher education: ‘professionalization’, ‘deregulation’, and ‘social justice’, which again roughly map on to these ideas. Aligned with this is the conceptualisation of teacher education as facing a series of associated problems in the preparation of teachers; a ‘learning problem, a ‘training’ problem, and a ‘problem of knowledge’, and as Zeichner (2006) argues, these are realised in discourses around who teachers are and what they do – creating policy issues of teacher professionalisation, deregulation and social justice. Hammerness and colleagues (2007) also recognise this history, and see the issues they raise slightly differently, as summarised in Table 1, below.

**Table 1. Problems for Teacher Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher education faces a problem of learning</th>
<th>Teacher education faces a problem of training</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moore (2004)</td>
<td>Good teachers are charismatic individuals</td>
<td>Good teachers are competent craftspersons</td>
<td>Good teachers are reflective practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldrich (2006)</td>
<td>Teacher education is viewed as apprenticeship</td>
<td>Teacher education is viewed as training</td>
<td>Teacher education is viewed as discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeichner (2006)</td>
<td>Teacher education is concerned with professionalization</td>
<td>Teacher education is concerned with deregulation</td>
<td>Teacher education is concerned with social justice</td>
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Rather than arguing for any one of these three ways of conceptualising teacher education as providing the means to an answer to these issues, a turn to practice recognises and works with them all in their inter-connection and inter-relation.

In thinking about a form of teacher education that might integrate and assist new teachers to work across these views, Korthagen and Kessels (1999) talked about these problems as three levels of experience within a teacher education program that might ensure learners become more fully rounded as professionals. They call these the Gestalt level, the schema level and the theory level, and charge teacher education with ensuring that all three are provided within teacher education curriculum. Such curriculum would be carefully staged, so that student teachers attend to problems of practice before they experience them:

> Constructed and guided experiences designed on the basis of an analytical understanding of teaching events are often more instructive than natural settings, because the essential cognitive dimensions are more easily accessible. Such experiences, in turn, provide the cognitive foundation for knowledge construction in more natural environments. Processes used to deliver teacher education content to novices must not only reveal pedagogical problems but also bring out ways of thinking about these problems and provide opportunities for novices actually to practice problem solving (Carter 1990:307).

This clearly supports the idea of teaching as an object of study, which, as articulated here by Carter (1990), needs to be carefully designed as teacher education curriculum.
FOREGROUNDING PRACTICE THROUGH THE STUDY OF TEACHING

As Green (2013) conceptualises it, prioritising practice in teacher education means designing the pre-service curriculum in ways that attend to all of these dimensions – with focus on the skills and attitudes for practice as well as the knowledge that is needed for teachers to continue to learn, to perfect their ‘craft’ over time, and develop their professional expertise.

The work of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986, 2005) provides useful insight on the process of learning to teach and learning about the practice of teaching – key concerns for teacher educators, as we consider what our graduates need to know to be able to work in increasingly complex classrooms. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) studied how the body is implicated in the search for expertise, showing how, over time, and with repeated opportunities for practice, developing practitioners gradually move from the highly planned, difficult to pull off teaching of their novice experience, to being able to take for granted aspects of their practice that were initially new to them. Once this happens, and more and more key components of practice become ‘habituated’, or located in their body, so that they do not have to think about them, they are able to give thought to other aspects of that practice, address the complexity of each new day in a classroom and integrate their skills, knowledge and ideals or attitudes, to achieve a more fluid and successful experience. As experience provides more and more practice, expertise develops. As Flyvbjerg (2006) explains:

Phenomenological studies of human learning indicate that for adults there exists a qualitative leap in their learning process from the rule governed use of analytical rationality in beginners to the fluid performance of tacit skills in what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) calls virtuosos and Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus (1986) true human experts. [...] Common to all experts, however, is that they operate on the basis of intimate knowledge of several thousand concrete cases in their areas of expertise. Context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity (Flyvbjerg, 2006:391).

Boud (2010) notes that studies focussed on the development of expertise such as the Dreyfus’ (2005) show that formal education and training only enables the development of early stages of expertise and that high-level competence occurs over many years. Similarly, though from a different tradition, Ball and Forzani (2009: 498) recommend the need for teacher education to provide student teachers with the opportunity to carefully study the practice of teaching, claiming that teacher education curriculum “must focus squarely on practice, with an eye to what teaching requires and how professional training can make a demonstrable difference—over sheer experience and common sense—in the quality of instructional practice”:

This means a comprehensive overhaul of the instructional goals that we set for those who seek to enter the teaching profession and of our approach to preparing novices. Whereas many beginners learn to teach on the job, [...] the task of professional education is to prepare people for the specialized work of teaching, improving significantly on what can be learned through experience alone. Doing this effectively in teaching requires dealing squarely with the both unnatural and intricate nature of instructional practice. It means unpacking and specifying practice in detail and designing professional education that will offer novices multiple opportunities to practice the work and to fine-tune their skills (Ball and Forzani 2009: 498).
It is important therefore that initial teacher education produces the sort of teaching subject who has carefully studied teaching in this way, and who is actually therefore more ‘ready’ for the classroom. As Boud reminds us:

_The dominance of the vocational move in higher education has created unrealistic expectations of ‘generic attributes’ and ‘employability’ skills as equipping students for immediate productive employment. Such a view (a) is [...] at odds with what we know about the development of expertise—any educational process can only enable learners to progress through a few stages of development, most occurs through interactions in practice (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 2005), and (b) implies that possession of a limited range of attributes provides for work-readiness. We need to focus on the self-regulatory skills that underpin all graduate attributes, and on the acquisition and utilisation of knowledge of all kinds (Boud 2010:261)._  

This means that if students are to be ready to continue to learn in the classroom, they need have studied their craft carefully, observing, practising and reflecting on how and why an expert teacher moves, arranges and uses her/his body in relation to the material elements of his/her teaching space. They will have studied how, when and why an expert teacher speaks and is silent, says things and listens, comments and responds to learners; how and why s/he sequences and arranges ideas and activities to assist the learners; and how s/he connects and interacts in relation to them as individuals and as a group. These are all important lessons to be learned from the _Study of Teaching_. While the beginner will not be able to integrate and synthesise her practice as well as the more experienced teacher, what is important is that s/he knows _how_ to study the practice of teaching, as well as the theory and policy that supports and structures education in general. In the next section I describe the way that we are aiming to ensure novice teachers will enter the classroom with the embodied knowledge that will provide a strong foundation for rapid and ongoing professional growth.

TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE STUDY OF TEACHING

In recent years at Charles Sturt University we have been attempting to see what happens when initial teacher education curriculum makes a conscious turn towards practice (Reid 2011, Pietsch et al. 2011). A program called _Study of Teaching_ has been a co-curricular offering for first year students first introduced in 2011. It was conceptualised within a larger program, _csuPRAC_, which places emphasis on _Programming, Relationships And Communication_ as core or essential teaching capacities that, in practice, help to synthesise the knowledge and understanding teachers need to begin a successful classroom career. In response to the Bradley Review of Higher Education in Australia (Bradley 2008), this intervention was also designed to improve both the quality of student engagement in the on-campus experience and the professional and academic skills of our teacher education students. In an environment of national teacher education program standards that might be seen as constraining curriculum and content choices for initial teacher education, the production of a standardised Australian Graduate Teacher (AITSL 2011) is a priority for the Faculty. The _Study of Teaching_ program has operated over three years now in a pre-service Bachelor of Education (Primary) program identified as attracting significant numbers of Low SES students, often the first in their families to undertake university education, and often from rural backgrounds.
Study of Teaching was therefore designed as a means of involving these students in authentic, meaningful activity that would assist both their social and academic engagement in the university setting, as well as serving as an introduction to the profession for which they were preparing. Working from the theoretical basis outlined above, the program provides incoming BEd (Primary) students with an opportunity to practise and develop – before they enter a school or other practice setting – a small set of core teaching skills that we see as useful to them across key learning areas. The implementation of this program, alongside the Faculty’s focus on enhancing the academic engagement of first year students provided a unique opportunity to support and enhance pre-service teachers’ confidence and competence as they entered the classroom. Following Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986, 2001) we believed that with the core elements of some common teaching practices safely embodied, and ‘under their belt’, they would be better able to begin to refine these in the complexity of classroom, teaching. We hoped that if they do not need to think about some very basic aspects of their practice because they already know what it feels like to ‘wait’ and ‘prompt’ for an answer during a discussion, they may be more able to attend, in their teaching, to the quality of content knowledge and reflect on issues of social justice and student learning as they work with children. We hoped that all these things would be more easily orchestrated so that they could operate in concert in their professional work of ‘Programming, Relationships And Communication’.

As noted, Study of Teaching is a co-curricular program. All other lectures and tutorials/workshops operate as normal in the course, and the program requires no changes to the weekly content or schedules of accredited subjects. But in addition to their classes and tutorials, all students have an additional two-hour timetabled Study of Teaching session each week. These sessions have been managed and organised by volunteer staff, and are not included in their teaching workload. These are either academic staff researching the effect of the program on student engagement (Mathewson-Mitchell et al 2012), feedback (Daniel, Auhl & Hastings 2011, 2012), or the development of professional identity (Pietsch et al 2011), or they are teachers and consultants who have offered to share their expertise with newcomers to the profession. In 2013 the volunteers have included final year pre-service teachers about to begin their Internship placements, and they have received a certificate of professional service and leadership appropriate to the Graduate Teaching Standards for this work. Sessions are timetabled after school hours so that the classroom teachers working in partnership with the Study of Teaching team can attend. The aim of the sessions is to integrate the opportunity for students to study teaching, through the regular, weekly, repeated practice of a core skill such as reading and discussing books and other texts with learners.

This allows the ideas that students have met in their other classes each week to be discussed in relation to the task at hand, so that foundational knowledge (about Piagetian stages of child development, for instance; language acquisition in children; or philosophical and social contexts of education) can be drawn upon and used when ‘de-composing’ the demonstration model (Grossman et al. 2009) and then in considering the most appropriate aspects of the lesson for students to practise. In this way, we see the sessions as integrative and connecting the curriculum – countering the fragmentation between ‘Methods’ and ‘Foundations’ courses and professional experience opportunities that Grossman et al. (2009) note is characteristic of much teacher education curriculum. Furthermore, these sessions are marked as important
and different from everyday classes because students are asked to dress like a teacher for these sessions. They practise building relationships and communicating clearly by introducing themselves as a pre-service teacher to each other, and to their academic teachers, the school teachers and the Principals who attend. They are given feedback on their appearance and interaction sometimes from school-age children, who attend the sessions with parents and caregivers. In the first year of the program a ten-year-old told us that a group of very well-presented young men looked just like his teachers except that “their hair is wrong”. This led to a critical and reflective discussion that ranged far beyond this issue, as we thought about what is ‘right’ in dress and appearance for teachers. This led to discussion about the conservatism of the profession, racism and homophobia in school settings as workplaces, and the difficulties many new teachers experience ‘fitting in’ with both staffroom and student expectations of them. An academic staff member with tattoos described how she covers them in a school workplace, and a recently-migrated Chinese academic provided a new perspective for us all when she shared how she dresses extremely professionally for her work at the university “in honour and respect for my profession”.

THE STUDY OF TEACHING PROCESS

As depicted in Figure 1 below, the Study of Teaching sessions follow a regular pattern. Drawing on Grossman’s et al. (2008, 2009) structure for teaching “core practices” in initial teacher education, we have used the idea of the demonstration, decomposition, and approximation of practice as key points in the process, along with explicit and focussed coaching to direct student teachers’ attention to the salient features of the practice they are attempting to master.

Figure 1. The Study of Teaching process

In its first year on the Bathurst campus1 of CSU, which is the focus this chapter, Study of Teaching focused on the core practice of reading aloud and leading discussion of

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1 The Study of Teaching program runs slightly differently on each of the Bathurst, Wagga Wagga and Dubbo campuses of CSU, in response to different staff interests and organisation. See Edwards-Groves
text. In the first semester students attended the program for four hours per week over 13 weeks, in addition to other classes. Two hours of this time was spent in a whole group session, while students were timetabled an additional two hours for unsupervised small group preparation time. The program continued in the second semester over an eight week period around the students’ first school placement, with an added focus before the placement on what we saw as a core instructional routine in primary classrooms – the teaching of handwriting. All students watched, analysed, planned and practised three handwriting lessons and had six lessons taught to them to improve their own knowledge and practise the use of the required (NSW Foundation) script before they entered a school setting. In this semester, two hours each week were spent in the handwriting practice classes, and one hour was spent in small groups continuing to practise reading aloud to preschoolers at the University’s on-site childcare centre. A further unsupervised hour was again recommended for small-group preparation and planning time for their handwriting lesson.

Although not the focus of my discussion in this chapter, it is interesting to note that we have progressed to the second third years of the program in 2012 and 2013, where we have re-iterated the original cycle with first year students, and extended the program to the core practice of explanation in Mathematics for a group of volunteer second year students who had participated the year before, and who continued in the program for two further semesters. The sessions are organised as follows:

- Each week, in the two-hour *Study of Teaching* session, students first watch a teacher demonstrate with them as a class, and/or view a video demonstration lesson of, the targeted practice. They engage in a guided reflection with the model teacher and other staff to support their articulation of key aspects of the teacher’s practice, focussing on what, how and why she performed each action. They are told about and discuss the teaching objective for the session, and they then select an appropriate resource in a small group, to plan a session that uses the strategies they have identified to reach the same objective. They then practise the reading and discussion as a rehearsal, with each student teacher making a roughly equal contribution to the delivery.

- For the practice performances, three groups combine, and their three practice-ed lessons are delivered to a practice class of 8-10 peers, one of whom records the session using a *Flip Video* camera, which is later transferred to the students’ own computers. During this process they receive immediate coaching from a teacher, academic, or final year student mentor, often requiring them to repeat a particular segment, question, gesture, or movement. This is seen as a coaching activity similar to practice new players have in the cricket nets, or on a golfing practice green, where skills can be repeated and refined without penalty. They then receive immediate peer and mentor feedback on the rehearsal as a whole.

- Each week, between *Study of Teaching* sessions, students can review the video of their teaching lessons – one in which they participated as learners, and one which they presented in the previous session.

and Hoare (2012) and Mathewson-Mitchell et al. (2012) for a more comprehensive account of the program.
EFFECTS OF STUDYING TEACHING

As reported in Mathewson-Mitchell et al. (2012), we observed many changes in student teachers’ embodied practice, as well as their level of knowledge of teaching over the year-long research period of the program’s first year. The regular practice of decomposition of examples of practice, the expert coaching, and the giving of feedback to each other two or three times each session meant that students were fairly quickly able to develop a meta-language for practice and to identify particular aspects of practice to look for, attend to and notice. Through their own approximations in the context of group work, they were able to rehearse, and in this form of performance experience, the bodily dimensions of practice. Repeated opportunities allowed them to take note, try again, improve, refine and ultimately become more comfortable with the practice of being a teacher. The process of observation, reflection and feedback further enhanced this understanding, while the use of videotaping provided a consciousness of the experience of the audience (or the future class of students):

Data collected after the first eight weeks of the Study of Teaching program indicated that students could articulate the skills they had developed. For example they noted the following aspects of their developing practice in reading aloud: using different tones of voice; using eye contact and facial expression; clarity, fluency, volume. Some also began to recognise the development of attributes in themselves such as confidence, enthusiasm (Mathewson-Mitchell et al, 2012:9).

As noted in Mathewson-Mitchell et al. (2012), quite significant examples of change are evident in student responses to our evaluation of the program. One student noted that he had developed the following knowledge and skills as a result of the program in its first stage:

- The ability to read aloud from a book with confidence and clarity
- To read this book in a manner that is engaging and promotes individual student thinking beyond it
- To ask stage appropriate open-ended and engaging questions whilst reading this book
- To dress in a professional yet practical manner in a school environment
- The ability to work in a collaborative environment – giving and receiving critical advice (Student response, Study of Teaching feedback)

There have now been ten action cycles across the three campuses, including the second-year program in 2012 on Bathurst, and the model and process for the sessions has remained fairly similar. Over this three-year period we have investigated four conditions or contexts for the program to establish an evidence base on which we have worked to introduce the Study of Teaching into the formal curriculum of our initial teacher education programs though a process of course review for national accreditation. As a co-curricular offering, students access this program outside of their normal load. However, in the first year, because of the research focus on students’ learning, the program was ‘sold’ to students as an important pre-requisite to their first Professional Experience placement. This meant that large numbers of students took part, and there were limited opportunities for extended and deep reflective critique of some of the practices that we were asking students to rehearse. In the handwriting sessions, for instance, the time needed for all students to teach their peers meant that we did not have time to problematise and connect the disciplinary goals of lessons such as these with other aspects of the curriculum. This was an
important omission for us, and it meant that the potential for the production of a
critical and transformative ‘teaching subject’ may have been compromised:

Unless individuals are also given access to the grounds for selection and the principles of
interpretation (and hence given more critical insight into the processes and possibilities of
knowledge production, their own and that of the culture), they are merely socialised into the
dominant meaning system and lack the capacity to take an active role in its transformation
(Green 2012: 7).

In subsequent years we have offered the Study of Teaching program as a voluntary co-
curricular activity while we refined the structure, sequence and resources for inclusion
as a compulsory aspect of the first and second years of study in the new course we
have been developing over this time. With smaller groups and the continued support
of classroom teachers and Final Year student mentors, the experience for our First
Year student teachers has been enhanced, although there are continuing challenges
that we meet and seek to address in our own practice as teacher educators.

CONCLUSION

Our orientation supports the complexity of the intention of the work of Grossman et
al. (2008, 2009), who advocate the placement of practice at the core of the teacher
education curriculum. Through this program we have attempted to engage first year
students, classroom teachers and university academics in an action research program
centred on understanding and developing particular core practices of teaching. This
has constituted the creation of a foundation of significant curriculum reform that is
being studying and elaborated on. It is an integrated, cross-curriculum attempt to
move initial teacher education courses toward what Grossman calls ‘a pedagogy of
enactment’, in a program directed towards what we argue are core practices that work
to inform teachers’ pedagogical success.

The focus on practice in this sense is not used as an opposition to theory, but rather as
complementary to theory and propositional knowledge, enabling the contextualisation
of theory in relation to experience. Through repeated observation, discussion,
constructive criticism, rehearsal and mimicry of expert practice, and the coaching and
modelling of expert others, students are actively engaged in examining the nexus
between theory and practice – and seeing themselves develop their teaching capacities
week by week. However we must be continually alert to ensure that the attention to
what and how teaching is ‘played out’ in different situations of practice does not lead
to us overlooking the need to consider and talk about the effects of any routinised
classroom practice in terms of social and educational justice (Zeichner 2012).

The csuPRAC Study of Teaching program has responded to the challenge proposed by
Grossman et al. (2008) to turn to a form of teacher education curriculum organised
around a core set of practices in which knowledge, skill and professional identity are
developed in the process of learning to practice. Yet teaching as an object of study is
always more than just embodied practice. It is always situated practice (Green &
Reid 2004, 2008), on a social field – happening at a particular time and place, and
with particular student communities. As we move forward in the development of the
Study of Teaching, on the basis of our research into attention to core practices of
teaching for the very beginners in first year, we continue to take up the challenge of
ensuring that critical perspectives and opportunities are not missed or discounted because of lack of time or opportunity. For the study of teaching, these are essential, and can be fostered by different forms of relationships with school partners to ensure student teachers have opportunity for practice their skills and inquiry in professional experience settings. As Zeichner (2012:379) argues:

The focus on teaching specific core teaching practices should be complemented by participation in teacher inquiry communities [...] from the very beginning of teachers’ preparation programs so that novice teachers can begin to acquire the habits and skills to learn in and from their practice in the company of colleagues.

Working with each other, as novices examining teaching as an object of inquiry, alongside more experienced and expert members of the teaching community in programs like Study of Teaching, is a way to address Zeichner’s (2012: 376) critique of practice-based teacher education which worries that it may not address the problems with performance-based systems in the past, and “ignore important aspects of good teaching”. These saw the answer to the problem of teacher education in terms of a single view of the problem itself, i.e. as a ‘training’ and skills based problem only. However, taking a practice turn to study how teaching is practised focuses talk and interaction about the affordances and constraints of different embodied skills and techniques, of routines and regularities of language and activity in classrooms, in relation to the different places, purposes, rationales and policies that contextualise them. Through engaging in the Study of Teaching with our teacher partners, we hope that our students will be ready to move towards the study of learning in classroom settings as the basis for teacher reflection, rethinking and renewal with regard to the programming, communication and relationships that, we believe, can best bring about effective learning.

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