Reflection in Teacher Education: It Starts With Me!

by Clare Kosnik

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Well I think one thing that surprised me [about the Mid-Town teacher education program] is you mean what you say and you say what you mean and follow it up with action. I have been in situations before where people have said we're going to take care of you and you're just going to love this. At first I thought, I know, ya, ya ya - I heard that before. But in Mid-Town it really rings true. Elizabeth

In the Mid-Town teacher education program at OISE/UT our broad goals for ourselves and our students are inquiry, integration and community. However, student teachers often enter the program believing they will be systematically taught how to teach mathematics, language arts, science, and so on; acquire fool-proof strategies for classroom management; and be given the names of prescribed curriculum textbooks (Britzman, 1986). As Louisa, a student teacher in this study noted, "I thought teacher education would be sitting in front of a lot of instructors, and you don't have anything to say, because you're going to be told everything that you need to know." Broader goals such as reflection, lifelong learning, and community building seem irrelevant for many at this early point in their careers. So, many student teachers are startled to discover the program is not technical and didactic (Darling-Hammond, Wise, and Klein, 1995). During their practicum placements they are overwhelmed by the complexity of the teaching process. As the program progresses, many student teachers begin to realize that learning to teach is not a simple endeavour; rather, it is a life-long process that builds on previous experiences, is shaped by individual contexts, and is a personal journey (Ross, 1990). To develop this perspective requires an environment that fosters self-study; increasingly, reflection has become central to teacher education programs (Tom, 1997). Having a program that addresses complex issues such as inquiry and reflection is not easy to develop or straightforward to manage. Is it feasible to teach skills, knowledge, an inquiry approach, and a reflective attitude during a teacher certification course? What type of teacher education program do beginning teachers need? What program structure best supports teacher development? What skills and knowledge do teacher educators need? Who should be the teacher educators?

Development of research on teacher education

In the last ten years, there has been a fairly dramatic increase in the number of teacher educators examining their work in an effort to improve their program and address the questions listed above. Although they have used a variety of processes -- self-study, action research, reflective practice, and life history -- the common goals are to understand and improve practice. The Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices Special Interest Group (SIG) at AERA is a dynamic group of teacher educators committed to studying their practice in an effort to make their programs more relevant and effective. In addition to AERA, the SIG has sponsored four conferences

(commonly known as the Castle Conference) which have attracted participants from both research-intensive and teaching-focused universities. At the Castle conferences a range of topics has been discussed: use of action research in preservice teacher education; students as co-researchers; value of critical friends; and challenges of conducting self-study research in a research-intensive university. (Richards and Russell, 1996; Cole and Finley, 1998; Loughran and Russell, 2000; Kosnik, Freese and Samaras, 2002). Beyond conference proceedings, numerous books and articles published by members of the SIG provide accounts of teacher educators studying their practices (eg., Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001; Cole, Elijah and Knowles, 1998; Dinkleman, 1999a, 2000; Ethell and McMeniman, 2000; Loughran and Russell, 2002; Russell and Korthagen, 1995; Segall, 2002.) Increasingly, journals are becoming more receptive to publishing teacher educators' research on their practice e.g. *Reflective Practice*. This proliferation of research has dramatically shifted research on teacher education from being a remote, objective study to a highly personal process for improving practice. Many of these teacher educators are in agreement with John Elliott who noted:

In my view, academics who teach and write about action-research theory, should see themselves as under an obligation to undertake second-order action-research into their own teacher education practices. Submission to such a discipline is essential if academics are to avoid perpetuating ideas which misrepresent and distort action-research in order to legitimate the hegemony of academics in their relations to teachers (1993, p. 177)

The range of topics investigated by teacher educators has expanded beyond simple teaching methods and curriculum content. Austin studied her ten-year collaboration with the Alaska Teacher Research network (1999). Bass, Anderson-Patton, and Allender (2002) examined the role of critical friends in gaining alternate perspectives on their work. Schuck's study of her mathematics methods course in the teacher education program confirmed her "feeling" that she had to "make the subject matter more explicitly linked to the content of the school curriculum (1999, p.8). Equally as innovative as the topics studied were the research methods employed. In Dinkelman's (1999) study of his work as a social studies methods course instructor, he discovered through individual interviews with his student teachers that they did not feel safe when participating in class discussions because he was perceived as judgmental. Russell (1986, 1997) used Schön's (1983) concept of "backtalk" as a method to access his students' response to his teaching. LaBoskey (1997) went so far as to construct a teaching portfolio exactly as required of her student teachers. Like her students she was vulnerable when questioned in a public forum about her entries and grew to appreciate the student perspectives on the value and limitations of professional portfolios. At the Hong Kong Institute of Education, teacher educators are required to do a "school attachment" or a return to being a classroom teacher for a semester (He and Heron, 2000). Through the Lecturer Attachment Scheme (LAS), the teacher educators had an opportunity to review many of the teaching practices they had been advocating for their student-teachers.

Goals of the study and research

At OISE/UT our 585 elementary student teachers are grouped into cohorts or "options." I work with the Mid-Town cohort; 65 student teachers with a small team of instructors (two full-time and four part-time). Given the size of the cohort I get to know the students well, have the

opportunity to integrate the program around a coherent philosophy, and connect the campus program with the practicum. My faculty team places a strong emphasis on community within the cohort, hoping thereby to make the campus experience more enriching and supportive for the students. We work hard at integrating theory and practice *within* the campus courses, avoiding courses that are heavily weighted in either a theoretical or a practical direction. And we have a strong inquiry emphasis in order to ensure that students are *engaged* with their courses and not just passive recipients of pre-set material (Borko et al 1997; Bullough and Gitlin, 1995; Loughran, 1996; Lyons, 1996; Ross, 1990; Zeichner and Liston, 1996). The courses in the Mid-Town campus program are mandated centrally by the school of education; however we have a fair degree of latitude in course design, teaching techniques, class grouping, and assignments. We try to weave reflection into the program, making it a natural and relevant tool for teacher development (Schön, 1983). Since discarding formal journal writing as a means for reflection we have developed numerous alternatives: collaborative reference letters; reflection papers on prescribed topics (mentors, classroom management); student-led presentations of their resource kits (portfolios); and individual ungraded interviews. I am always looking for new and interesting ways to increase opportunities for reflection for the student teachers and myself. In this paper I wish to focus on how I have come to model a reflective approach in my own teaching.

Like the teacher educators mentioned in the previous section, I approach my work as a teacher educator as both teacher and researcher. I have actively conducted numerous research studies, examining the many aspects of practice teaching, the action research process, and the impact of a cohort arrangement on student learning. These studies helped me appreciate some of the dynamics and challenges of the teacher development process. However, these research studies have only incidentally touched on my course instruction. I was hesitant to turn the research lens on my particular campus course. It was much safer to study other, less personal aspects of the program; however in the academic year 2000 2001 I set out with some trepidation to study my work as a language arts instructor in the Mid-Town Option. Although my work was deeply personal, I could not conduct this self-study research on my own; I needed other voices and perspectives. A colleague in the Mid-Town Option was interested in examining his work so we decided to broaden the study to include our two courses: Language Arts (a curriculum course) and School and Society (a foundations course). The study would have been incomplete without the participation of my student teachers yet I was nervous about involving them.

Co-researching with a colleague seemed fairly straightforward yet involving students required some serious examination. From previous research with student teachers I knew they found being involved in my research (e.g. on the practicum component of the program) interesting and rewarding; however, this study involved me more directly. It changed from research on the program to co-research on my course. I had to design a study that did not jeopardize the students, given our differing status (professor - student), one that provided learning opportunities for them while also protecting me. I decided to use a modified semi-structured interview format. Although the questions had to be somewhat pre-established, I wanted to have focused, in-depth discussions while allowing both students and myself to pursue relevant lines of inquiry. The interviews would be both focused and conversational, students could ask me questions, suggest questions, and I could engage in discussion. I saw this study as evolving over the course of the year; I recognized I would have to rework questions and schedules as I learned from the students and I

would have to involve them fully in planning the next steps of the research. Unlike more traditional research the methodology was not pre-determined.

In this paper I report mainly on those aspects of the study which relate to my own teaching and teacher education. I begin with a more detailed description of the research methods I used and then describe some of the findings from the study. Although I gathered substantial data on the "nuts and bolts" of the course, I have chosen to report on more general issues. In the concluding section I discuss my experiences in working with student teachers as co-researchers.

Methodology of the study

The main data source for the study was two sets of semi-structured interviews with 9 of our student teachers from the 2000-2001 program year. The students were randomly selected, but with provision to ensure roughly proportional representation of females and males and primary/junior and junior/intermediate candidates. There were 7 females and 2 males in the sample (with 80% females in the cohort as a whole) and 5 junior/intermediates and 4 primary/juniors (with about half-and-half in these categories in the cohort). We interviewed the students in December 2000, that is, mid-way through the program; and again in April 2001, that is, at the end of the campus program but before the final internship. The interviewing was divided among three people: myself; my colleague; and a teacher-librarian who is a graduate of the program. The interviews on both occasions were about an hour in length; they were tape-recorded and the tapes transcribed. As promised to the interviewees, their names and the names of their associate teachers have been replaced by pseudonyms in this report.

The questions were in broad categories: general impressions of the program; the *campus* program in general; the Language Arts course; the School and Society course; the practicum; cross-program assignments; and their development as teachers. The interviews were fairly open: some probe questions were asked and side comments were not discouraged. However, I made sure a specific set of questions was asked by all three interviewers. Some interviews were fairly conversational, with me participating more fully than in traditional interviews. My student co-researchers and I had email discussions between interviews which I included in my data source. When visiting them during practicum or chatting before/after class, I made follow-up notes.

A query might be raised about how frank the students will be when interviewed by an instructor about his or her own course (a type of question which might often be raised in the context of self-study research). However, I have examined the responses with this concern in mind and found that the students were just as negative (or positive) about a course when interviewed by the instructor of the course as when interviewed by one of the other interviewers. In fact, one of the difficulties I often had and this surprised me was remaining calm and not becoming defensive when an interviewee was criticizing some aspect of my course. On the other hand, of course, I was pleased with the frankness of the student teachers about the program, since it was in keeping with the atmosphere of trust, openness, and joint inquiry the Mid-Town team tries to foster in the program.

Since co-research was an element of this study, after the first interview I gave each participant his/her transcribed interview. As the students read their interviews, at their leisure, all responded

to it either through email or one-on-one conversations. In these informal discussions students provided suggestions for the next interview (i.e. topics, questions, or timing). Typically, I provide research participants with the transcripts and report at the end of the study but in this case I wanted their in-put in developing the study.

In analyzing the transcripts, I began by reading them several times to identify themes relevant to the issue of the effectiveness or otherwise of the campus program. For each theme I developed terms/phrases or "codes" which seemed to capture the type of impact, factor, or problem the student teachers talked about, for example: "general approach to teaching," "specific skills," "professionalism," "faculty modelling," "community support," "lack of detail on curriculum." I then placed a list of these codes beside columns for each of the interviewees and, going through the transcripts again, recorded the pages on which reference was made to each topic. During this process it became apparent that some themes had to be deleted, combined, or modified, and new ones added. With the resulting table of codes and frequencies before me, I was able to form a tentative structure of key themes and sub-themes. I then began writing the report, going back to the transcripts to elaborate the themes and gather representative quotations. As I continued the writing and checking process, I found I had to adjust some themes further and modify my selection of quotations to better represent the content of the transcripts.

The methodology employed in this study was qualitative, as defined by Punch (1998). For example, I was a participant observer, had a small sample (the 9 interviewees), the interviews were open-ended, the data were often not expressed numerically, and I made extensive use of examples and quotations in reporting. The codes for analyzing the data were modified as the analysis continued. There was a quantitative component to my reporting: I often indicated the number or proportion of interviewees who held a particular view or responded in a particular way. Following Hammersley (1992), Merriam (1998), and Punch (1998), I believe such information can be relevant even in a qualitative study. However, the inquiry was still primarily interpretative in nature. For example, the coding of responses was obviously partly a matter of judgement, and the meaning attached to each code or theme depended on my interpretation of the student teachers' responses. In making these judgments and interpretations I was undoubtedly influenced to some extent by my experiences in teacher education and interactions with student teachers over the years.

Student response

In general, the student teachers were enthusiastic about the language arts course and felt they were gaining confidence as language arts teachers. Although I, the course instructor, was interviewing my student teachers, they did not shy away from identifying some activities/lectures that did not work. As I examined the data four broad themes emerged with some suggestions for improvement.

Impact of my personal qualities

Initially, I thought the bulk of the discussion would be limited to technical aspects of my teaching; however, the student teachers immediately focused on my personal attributes humour, caring, friendliness, efficiency, and so on. I was further surprised when they zeroed in on my

respect for them. This was viewed as one of the key strengths of the program and my teaching. As Rita noted, I treated the student teachers like equals.

What I really liked about [Mid-Town] was the professors don't downplay us and you don't make us feel as if we're beneath you, which in university, that's what most professors did. I really enjoy the fact that you look at us like we're on the same level, we're here for the same reasons.

Respect for students is a given for me, something I do not focus on; this is the way I work with people. Yet for the Mid-Town students this was one of the exemplary traits of the program and my teaching. Being involved in problem-solving and having input in the program were in stark contrast with the way they had been treated in their undergraduate programs and very different from what they had expected of this program. "You make us feel confident. You don't speak to us as though we don't know anything. You make use feel like a teacher. You keep saying you are a teacher."

As this topic was repeatedly raised, I decided to pursue the issue. What did I do to show the students I respected them? What does respect look like for a student teacher? Paul responded as follows:

Everything that happens seems so well thought out and researched . It feels like you're being considered. Like we're the main reason that you're here, to teach us, so you think about us. You don't think, Oh I have to do this or whatever. You think, Is this going to be really effective? Is this going to be useful [for the students]?

Given the length of the program (nine months), I aimed to capitalize on our time together by being highly organized. This organization was appreciated by the students and seen as respect. Tina provided another example of the way I demonstrate respect. She believed that my willingness to go to the pub or eat lunch with students sent a very strong message to them. "I think [professors socializing with students] shows that they're interested in us outside of the field, and that the whole social aspect of your life is a very important part of your life." Respect took many forms for these students and they could easily identify respectful practice.

All student teachers felt I was knowledgeable about language arts, assessment and evaluation, classroom management, and so on; however, knowledge of the field turned out to be only one aspect of effective instruction. In Kathryn's interview, conducted by my colleague, she noted:

[Clare] shares her wealth of knowledge with us. A lot of people have lots of knowledge but they don't share it. But she really knows how to bring things forward in a very sensible, organized way that will be of use to us. And her handouts are excellent. She made me want to read more She really has a way of connecting with the students. My thought is students want to know that you care before they hear what you know. She does that well.

As the year progressed, I became quite friendly with all the student teachers, not just those in the study. This so impressed Louisa she concluded that teachers must "get to know [their] students. Get to know where they're from, their backgrounds and really learn about them. That's the only way you'll be able to reach them." As I got to know her, our relationship became one of

colleagues working together rather than the traditional student to teacher. This mutuality was pivotal when her second practice teaching placement had some unusual challenges, her associate teacher being highly uncooperative. Because of our strong relationship I could help her work through the situation without serious damage to her self-esteem. She commented that my support for her further convinced her that a strong student-teacher relationship is a crucial part of teaching.

2. Impact of my teaching, modelling, and reflection

All of the student teachers felt they had become more confident as language arts teachers, in part as a result of my course. Rita noted that through the in-class discussions and my example she "became more creative, that's for sure. Basically, now, the ideas just start flowing." Linda noted that I got her to "think outside the box." Paul concluded that I had shown him that language arts teaching must be creative. Janet realized that language arts teaching encompasses many subjects, not just reading, writing, and so on.

Along with the other members of the Mid-Town faculty team, I try to demonstrate a variety of teaching strategies, using multiple forms of assessment, being flexible about topics, devising open-ended assignments, and configuring the class into many forms of grouping (interest, division, self-selected, and random). Given the cohort arrangement, we have a measure of control over our work, thus making these goals feasible. We want to model effective teaching strategies because we believe student teachers learn from our example. Did they in fact recognize and appreciate my efforts at modelling? All nine student teachers realized I was attempting to model effective teaching; all felt I was achieving this goal. For example, Janet commented, "You made language arts interactive. That's something I want to [do] as well." Linda was very direct on the subject.

I like the way the professors taught by example. Not just saying oh make it creative, they tried to make it creative. Instead of saying try to get people talking or physically moving around, they did it by example. So that was really helpful because I found I used a lot of those tactics in my practicum.

Rita felt that my modelling influenced her both professionally and personally:

Seeing how you were towards us was important. All of our professors were caring and it taught us that it's not just curriculum, curriculum, curriculum. Or this is what you need to learn to be a good teacher. The program is more to help us become like [good teachers] and I think that's what a lot of us are going to remember.

Kathryn identified another positive effect of the modelling. It motivated students to work hard.

I think the bar has been set high in terms of expectations and also in terms of when you have professors who prepare SO well and have such great teaching techniques. And how they model classroom management and so on and so forth. It really makes you think how you are going to deliver a lesson. It challenges you to do better. It is definitely stimulating.

Beyond modelling a variety of teaching techniques, I wanted student teachers to see learning to teach as a life-long process. In our discussions on reflection and action research my own current self-study was a ready example. It gave me credibility. It was not a secret among the student teachers that I was doing this research, and most were impressed and surprised. One participant in the study described a peer's initial reaction to the program. "Peter was so funny. He was saying, If I hear the word reflect one more time, you know what I am going to do. Later he said, but now I realize [the instructors] do it too." Numerous student teachers in the study commented that I was a very good teacher and they could not believe I had to work at improving my practice. I believe that their immersion into the Mid-Town program helped expand their conception of a teacher to one of a thoughtful practitioner.

Involving students as co-researchers had a strong impact on them in a variety of ways. For example, Janet was so impressed with my self-study that she did a similar exercise with her sixth grade students (in her second practice teaching placement). She asked the students to complete a questionnaire about her work as a teacher. Some of the questions were remarkably similar to questions I had asked her. She was so delighted by their responses, "they made me cry." She concluded that involving the children "was such a good thing to do. It'll do it every year."

3. Impact of the Mid-Town community

As a team of instructors, one of our efforts is to develop the cohort into a community. The objectives of the cohort arrangement include: creating a more coherent program; developing a strong link between theory and practice; achieving a closer relationship between faculty and student teachers; establishing conditions conducive to mutual support among student teachers; and modelling a communal, collaborative approach to teaching and learning that student teachers can apply in their practicum settings and in their school and classroom after graduation. All nine participants talked frequently and spontaneously about the positive impact the community had on their learning.

Mid-Town was home. I knew that when I could come into the class that I was accepted. There was that team effort. There was the joking. There was the caring community that was there from the very beginning. We were trying to make it happen because the instructors modelled that from the very beginning. Even before we knew the person next to us, when we looked at the panel of instructors we KNEW that they really had a community and were going to make a community out of us. And it really happened.

The Option community did much more than merely provide a "good feeling;" it had a positive impact on student teacher learning. Each person in the study developed a sense of belonging, which led to full participation in discussions and activities; the student network became highly active, leading to extensive sharing of curriculum resources; and students found kindred sprits who could provide support. The community also provided an opportunity for all of us (myself included!) to become aware of other perspectives.

Mid-Town has shown me that everyone has something to say that is of importance. We come from all these different experiences, people have come from past careers, there's always another way of looking at it. Everyone only has a piece of the puzzle.

Linda, who came to teacher education after a professional career and then being home to raise her children, felt the immersion in the Mid-Town community influenced her philosophy of education.

The Mid-Town experience has been great. The community spirit leading by example. When I have my own classroom I'm going to make it clear that you get points for helping each other. Cooperation is important in a classroom. I don't want it to be a competitive environment.

I was surprised the student teachers had difficulty separating my teaching from the work of others on the team. They simply saw us as the "Mid-Town Team," often the instructors were interchangeable! When talking about my course they often used the inclusive "you." Student teachers saw first-hand a team-teaching approach. Once again, my discussion about the importance of working with colleagues rang true because the student teachers saw me as a member of the team of instructors and the Option community.

4. Students becoming reflective

Did the Mid-Town program in fact achieve the goal of helping student teachers become more reflective? In examining this question, I drew on the data from this study, along with classroom observations, and student teachers' work in the practicum. To begin, the student teachers gained an awareness that reflection is part of being an effective teacher; it is not simply an add-on or a university make-work project. For example, Louisa said:

I see the need to take more time to reflect. From the beginning of the program to now I have changed. I started off working two jobs and now I am not working. I see how WONDERFUL it is to have time to go home, to cook and think.

The assignments, especially the action research, further helped the student teachers realize that teaching is not simply curriculum delivery. Through first-hand research -- interviewing children, collecting samples of work, and developing curriculum modifications -- they realized the importance of systematic research on their classes. In discussion of his action research project Paul concluded:

I thought it was a way of setting up an attitude towards a proactive stance in the classroom. Having to be involved, not just having the program set up but really looking at the program and talking to the students about it, how they felt about it . It gives you time out from being a teacher, to look at it from a different perspective. So that was a really good experience.

Acting as co-researchers also helped the student teachers learn interview techniques, work through a method of self-study, appreciate first-hand the value co-researching, and realize the benefit to the teacher of classroom research. Janet commented:

[Mid-Town] has influenced me because you've made us aware of the fact that teaching is so much more than just teaching. That comes with your philosophy of being thoughtful, examining what you do.

For my co-researchers, involvement in the research gave them an opportunity to reflect on their learning in a format other than a written journal or reflection paper; they described their learning about the course of which I had intimate knowledge; they raised questions without having to provide answers; and we worked together on articulating their learning. All of this seemed to lead to a deeper understanding of their learning. By "talking through" their learning, reading and reacting to the transcripts of their interviews, reflecting on their previous comments, and returning to topics, we both grew to understand what was being taught and learned, why there were barriers to learning, and what supported learning. The Mid-Town program offered multiple methods for reflection. Hopefully each student teacher will have found a meaningful way to reflect on his/her own work.

5. Suggestions for improvement

Not only did the student teachers identify positive aspects of the course, they also offered suggestions for improvement. Their feedback was particularly helpful because it provided more detail than usually found in formal course evaluations. Four general areas were identified as needing "improvement." First, the student teachers wanted more specifics on how children learn to read. Although I presented numerous sessions on reading, they obviously were not effective. I need to reconsider my approach to early literacy and rework my classes to make the information more accessible. In the future I will consider a more substantive focus on early literacy, using videos to provide examples of strong early literacy classrooms and giving clearer information on stages of development. To accomplish the latter goal I will use some "levelled" pupil texts to show students developmentally appropriate materials and to outline strategies to support development. I will also have the student teachers seek out and visit the Literacy Coordinator in their practice teaching schools; interview him/her regarding the early literacy programs in their schools; and report back to the larger group. This in-school task should help them become very familiar with board mandated programs and provide an example of early literacy program.

Secondly, student teachers preparing to teach middle school wanted more attention to novel study before the first practicum. Quite often they are asked to assume responsibility for some of the novel study in their practice teaching class. This area tends to be of interest because many recall the tedious lessons from their youth and they want to engage pupils more fully. However, they are often unsure what to do. The material I distributed on this topic was well received, because it provided an alternative to chapter by chapter comprehension questions. Unfortunately, it came too late in the course to be of value during the practicum. I plan to compile a "Novel Study Resource" binder which students can access early in the term.

In terms of modelling effective teaching techniques, students felt I accomplished this goal; however, they felt more could be done in this area. Student teachers noted that a particular type of in-class participation was extremely effective. As one student concluded, we like to "do." Since our large and small group discussions seemed to be lively I was surprised by these comments. As co-researchers they could provide very specific information on what "doing" looks like. Two examples of truly effective teaching were my work on poetry and on writing in role. In the former case, students worked in groups to bring a poem "to life." The latter session on writing in role was done as a response to the book *The Gift of the Magi.* Although we had had discussions, jigsaws, and small group inquiry, student teachers found it especially useful to

experience, first-hand, a learning/ teaching strategy such as writing in role because they got to experience the strategy rather than simply talk about it. In the future I will rethink the place and extent of discussion in the class. For each area of language arts I will have a "doing" session; this will require me to substantially modify some of my classes. Finding the right balance between doing, lecturing, and discussing will be critical and will probably be different for each group of students. I am planning to have some form of regular feedback process to help me achieve the fine balance.

And finally, my student teachers, like many other students, want more practical teaching tips. As a teacher educator, I struggle to balance theory and practice, but students repeatedly request a heavy emphasis on the practical. Their immediate needs are so great that they often cannot appreciate the place of theory. Finding an appropriate balance is a constant struggle. I need to be constantly aware of the students' needs and priorities. Next year, I will compile some resource packages that will be full of practical tips; hopefully, these materials will provide the security they need.

My reflections on the process

Involving my students as co-researchers provided me with a great deal of useful feedback. The structure of the process -- semi-structured interviews, email conversations, and informal discussions -- worked well. In many cases the interview became a dialogue, allowing me to pursue specific topics in detail. However, having a few interviewers required me to ask the prescribed questions.

Not surprisingly, I felt vulnerable in opening myself to potentially negative criticism. Having been a teacher for 25 years, teaching is very important to me. Although I have consistently had high teaching evaluations, I really was not certain how students actually felt about my course. Once I got the sense they were generally pleased with the course -- my approach to them, my teaching style, and my jokes -- I could relax somewhat. However, at times it was difficult not to be defensive. For example, while many student teachers are fixated on receiving practical tips and foolproof activities for the beginning of the school year, I do not believe there is a "magic" unit for the first week of September. As this issue was raised repeatedly in the interviews I wanted to shout, There is no detailed unit plan that I can give you! At times it was truly difficult not to respond forcefully.

Being both professor and co-researcher with my students sometimes made for some difficult situations. Many times I was impressed with their thoughtfulness, commitment, flexibility, and maturity. All participants willingly sacrificed some of their personal time to come to the interviews, read transcripts, and make suggestions for next steps of the research. From their comments it was obvious they took their co-researching work very seriously. Yet at other times some of the participants displayed inappropriate behaviour in class. It was difficult to reconcile these contradictory actions. Although I tried to understand their behaviour by recognizing they were dealing with the pressure of an intense program, sometimes I was disappointed with some of the participants in this study.

The student teachers' expectations for the program were high; at times, I thought, exceedingly demanding. Since they are preparing to be teachers they should know first-hand how draining and challenging teaching can be. But some did not seem to see me as a teacher who has to do class preps, mark assignments, has fears and disappointments, and has a whole research and writing agenda. All know the phrase "publish or perish," but somehow this did not apply to me! How can I let students know that I am just a person too and a professor at a very demanding research institute?

I take my work in teacher education very seriously: I remain current, am available to students, and visit frequently during practice teaching. Although this work is demanding and time consuming much of it is not recognized in the university reward system. As student teachers talked about instructors beyond the Mid-Town team, I was appalled at some of my colleagues' behaviour. I was uncertain whether I should include this finding in this paper; however, the criticism was so constant and at times so emotional I chose to include it in this paper. I was left with the question: Should I work as hard as I do?

Although this self-study was highly useful and at times very enjoyable, I am not sure I could have done it earlier in my career. It took courage and a fairly high measure of self-confidence to explicitly examine my course instruction. Having a colleague in a similar situation helped me through the process. We talked about the experience, the importance of feedback, and the value of self-study. I have learned a great deal about my teaching, myself, and my student teachers. I believe it was a win-win situation for all involved. I would certainly do this type of study again and look forward to implementing some of the suggestions.

Next Steps

In an earlier section, I outlined some concrete changes I will make to my specific course. These are fairly obvious and in direct response to suggestions for improving the course. Less obvious though is the impact this research has had on my understanding of becoming a teacher. I cannot help but hear the voices of my co-researchers. Marcello saying he was so uncomfortable doing drama in the class he "wanted to die." Paul, a gifted your teacher, agonizing over his future career: Does he really want to be a teacher? Paula suggesting we should forego theory and focus exclusively on acquiring practical tips. And Elizabeth revealing that initially she did not believe we wanted to support students. I can clearly recall her comment, "I had heard it before, you *really* want to help!" Their voices have become part of my thinking about the preservice program. They remind me of the student perspective; the cynicism of some students; and the tensions many must reconcile.

Having two professors from the same program engaged in self-study clearly demonstrated to our students the seriousness with which we approach our teaching. I would like to extend an invitation to other faculty/instructors in the Mid-Town Option to become engaged in the self-study of their practice. With some of my grant money all/most instructors could participate in research on the program and their teaching. They too could be working with students as co-researchers. If we embark on this journey together, the Option program will be infused with reflection, many students will have the opportunity to work as co-researchers, and no instructor will feel alone as he/she becomes the object of study. I will bring forward this suggestion at our

first faculty team meeting next year. And I hope more student teachers will follow our example to get feedback from the children in their practice teaching classes.

This current study should not stay within the pages of a journal article or a notation on a C.V. It must become part of the Mid-Town history. I hope our research-based approach will strengthen our program, become the framework for our Option, and model for students thoughtful practice. Reflection has to begin with me. I will invite others to participate; hopefully many will accept the challenge.

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