From Practicum to Practice:

Two Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of the Quality of their Preservice Preparation

by

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Abstract

This study focuses on the preservice preparation and professional growth of two first-year teachers. Despite a successful year at a faculty of education, the induction into teaching is still often described in terms of reality shock and baptism by fire. In order to survive this ordeal, the beginner must re-evaluate what had seemed self-evident: the role of a teacher and the tasks of teaching. In this study, the gap between preparation and practice is explored through the insights of two beginning teachers as they discuss the quality of their preservice program in relation to the demands and expectations of practice. These teachers' experiences support studies that emphasize the importance of making explicit, early in a teacher candidate's program, the requirements of daily teaching from a teacher's perspective. Without such professional understanding, beginners retain their student-based conception of the role of teachers, making little experiential sense of the theory and practica opportunities offered in preservice programs.

Although it is possible to see the similarities between these two teachers' first-year experiences and those of other beginners, it is important to note that this has been a powerful year in the lives of these people. Often blunt, their interpretations come from living, sharing, and coping with unfamiliar and challenging professional practice as it unfolds. This is their reality, before the retrospect of subsequent years of teaching can temper their thoughts. As such, it is also part of the purpose of this study to ensure that their novice voices are not dismissed or discounted, as it is precisely these perceptions that are being sought in an effort to further understand the beginner's predicament.

their classrooms over the course of their challenging and demanding first year. They are both dedicated and professional teachers, and as their second year of teaching begins I know they are both thankful that it is not the same time last year.

In memory of my Dad, whose enduring sense of humour

helped me through this whole process.

For

David, Cameron, Teagan

and

of course,

my Mom

without all of your support there would not have been a thesis!

And thanks to all of you in the cheering section.

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CHAPTER 1

FROM PRACTICUM TO PRACTICE

Introduction

"Why can't I teach them anything? What am I doing wrong?

I thought I was a qualified teacher."

"I'm really sick of that whole, the first year is about survival mentality.

I mean that is the reality, but that means we're not getting something. "

Despite the best intentions of teacher education programs, the first year of

teaching leaves many beginning teachers feeling that something was missing from their

preservice preparation. A successful year in a faculty of education too often creates for

candidates the perception that they are fully prepared for the real world of teaching.

When the self-image and the "missionary ideals" that go with it meet the realities of

classroom life, "reality shock" sets in (Veenman, 1984, pp. 143-144). This sink-or-swim

situation demands that novice teachers re-examine their vision of self as teacher and their

understanding of the tasks of teaching as they also reconstruct their approach to the

curriculum, their management style, and their expectations for themselves and students in

order to survive the first year (Corcoran, 1981; Kagan, 1992; Ryan, 1970; Weinstein,

1988). The question central to this study is "How do two beginning teachers' perceptions

of the quality of their preservice preparation evolve during their first year of teaching?"

Simply stated, the beginner's predicament seems to be the result of an almost

inevitable gap between preparation and practice. Not so simply stated are the reasons

why this disparity exists and persists. This study adds the voices and experiences of two

first-year teachers to the volume of material that addresses this issue (see Kagan, 1992 for

a comprehensive review). Over the course of the 1999-2000 school year, Julia and Jason

(both teachers requested their real names be used, but students' and colleagues' names are

pseudonyms) shared their thoughts and impressions about the quality of their preservice

programs in relation to the demands of daily teaching.

Jason and Julia's preservice and first-year experiences mirrored in many ways

those of most new teachers. They approached their first classrooms without an

understanding of the "intentionality" required by teaching. Unable to make connections

during their preservice years between the theory taught at the university and the depth and

range of decision-making involved in practice, Julia and Jason's unchallenged, student-

generated images of teaching were based more on persona than reality. Ideally, these

teachers would have had the opportunity to "access the minds, not only the observable

behaviors, of effective teachers" (Ethell & McMeniman, 2000, p. 87). Without such an

understanding of the deeper pedagogical questions and issues that must anchor one's

practice, as candidates they remained locked into pre-existing, implicit beliefs about what

it means to be a teacher. These perspectives prevented them from making the

connections between the theory presented at the university and the realities of the

classroom, even with the extended classroom exposure that Julia, in particular,

experienced and valued (Berliner, 1987; Calderhead, 1989; Ethell, 1998; Ethell &

McMeniman, 2000). This inability to apply, examine, and decode theoretical material within personal experience further entrenched the dichotomy between theory and practice. Like Julia, most teacher candidates then mistakenly see their ability to successfully mimic their associate (or past) teachers as learning to teach, elevating the importance of this classroom exposure over the time spent at their faculty listening to teacher talk.

> Everything from September to December was helpful. Whether or not you agreed with the teacher, you sit back and you watch and you learn. Everything that happened during that practicum placement was completely beneficial, except for the on-campus week[s] that we had in November, not necessary. Because it was all spent in PROF 190 which was a real waste of time. (Ju5J107)

The irony of Julia's statement is that the course she refers to, "Theory and Professional Practice," is intended to assist teacher candidates in constructing professional knowledge through their practicum experiences. Julia did indeed spend her four practicum months "watching," as she was unable to see beyond the actions of her associate teacher to the intentions behind this teacher's practice. Without the necessary cognitive strategies for thinking about teaching and teacher decision-making, Julia's perceptions seem typical of novices, who cannot make sense of theory or interpret it meaningfully within their preservice practica and future practice. Consequently, as Jason states, much of the information that the Faculty thinks it has communicated is lost: "*As a student teacher you don't even know how to see the information that's going up on the overhead*" (Js1J66). As the year progressed and these candidates moved along without having to confront or challenge their self-images grounded in years of observation of teaching without access to

thinking about teaching, the distance between theory and practice persisted, as did a slightly "unrealistic optimism" about their future abilities to perform as teachers (Ethell, 1999, p. 16; see also Corcoran, 1981; Montgomery Halford, 1998; Veenman, 1984; Weinstein, 1988).

When preparation met practice and the depth and persistence of the requirements of daily teaching became apparent, Jason and Julia responded as many do, by concluding that their preservice programs were of inferior quality and provided insufficient preparation for the real world of teaching. This conclusion sent them looking elsewhere, and not back to their coursework, for the answers to their professional dilemmas.

Determining if their programs (see Appendix A for an outline of their preservice programs) were indeed deficient is not the purpose of this study. The overheads that Jason could not "see" may have been rich with useful information or full of outdated models. For present purposes that is irrelevant in light of these teachers' perceptions that their programs were inadequate as preparation. As their first months of teaching ensued, both began to see with increasing clarity and detail what was not explicitly visible to them during their preservice years. From this informed, experiential point of view, the gaps between professional preparation and professional practice became clear to Julia and Jason. Working with these perceptions, this study attempts to more fully understand the reasons behind the beginner's predicament.

Situating the Research

Like Julia, Jason, and the majority of first-year teachers, I also endured a memorable and not altogether pleasant first year. Unlike many teachers, I managed to experience that trauma twice. Initially, I was hired on Labour Day and arrived on the first day of school to find a Bible, a full box of yellow chalk, and 28 large and loud Grade 6 students. The lack of fit between my Concurrent Program's preparation and the realities of that classroom left me reeling from the enormity of what I did not know. I emerged from the first-year fog secure in the knowledge that surviving this trial meant that finally I was prepared to teach. Three years and three different schools later, I was confronted with the qualifier to my confidence, an inner-city K-1 class. I was once again a beginning teacher, shocked by the extent of my ignorance. In this unfamiliar environment, keeping the students in the classroom was far beyond my ability, teaching was out of the question, and I certainly did not smile until far past Christmas.

My interest in this topic emerges from this personal background as well as from my experiences with teacher candidates and first-year teachers. These factors combined with escalating retirement rates (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2000) and continuing budget cuts means that the opportunities will decline for beginners to experience teaching as a craft, embedded with moral implications and not as a means-ends endurance race. As a colleague, an associate teacher, and a parent of two young children, I am concerned by the reality that our schools will soon, of necessity, be full of first-year teachers who without better preparation and support have a tremendous chance of turning into unhappy, over-worked, technicians (Diamond, 1991; Goodman, 1987). From these experiences

and apprehensions my initial questions grew into the need to explore the link between

preparation and practice, with an eye to the possibility that we could move beyond (at

least in my classroom and collegial corner of the world) our complacency about being a

"profession that eats its young" (Montgomery Halford, 1998, p. 33).

Setting the Stage:

Research Strategy and Introduction of Participants

To uncover more about the quality of the beginner's program and its connection to

the teacher's first year, I began a search for a recent faculty of education graduate. In

August 1999 I was fortunate to find Julia, a teacher in this position, and she introduced

me to Jason, also a beginner. Julia and Jason were pool-hired in the spring of 1999 and

then placed in the same school in an inner-city neighbourhood. Although both are

certified Primary/Junior teachers, Julia was preparing to teach Grade 8 and Jason to teach

Grade 7, with over half of his class working to Individual Educational Plans. Like many

beginners, these teachers were "given equal or more difficult assignments than 10-year

veteran teachers, and [were] expected to perform as if they were experienced" (Berliner,

1987, p. 60; see also Etheridge, 1989; Goodman, 1987; Kane, 1991). Both teachers

questioned the wisdom of these assignments, but their school board partially redeemed

itself by providing useful workshops through-out the year for all beginning teachers.

Jason and Julia allowed me to tape record our conversations and to visit their

classrooms over the course of the 1999-2000 school year (see Appendix B for a record of

meetings). The teachers were given the opportunity to select our meeting place each

time. Julia preferred my house and Jason had a variety of local restaurants that he chose

for our conversations. Together we chronicled their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions of their preservice preparation in light of the demands and expectations of classroom teaching. All conversations were transcribed to computer files and given on disk to the teachers for comment or editing ideas. As well, I kept an anecdotal journal of my impressions of the research process, classroom visits, and thoughts during the investigation. Also, Jason shared some of his early ideas about our study from his journal.

All material referenced from the transcriptions is coded as in the following example: (Js1J13). The Js indicates it was a conversation with Jason, the number indicates which conversation, the next J indicates that Jason was speaking and the number is the time he spoke in that conversation. Julia's conversations are coded in the same manner, with Ju representing our dialogues. Thus (Ju4J16) would indicate Julia's transcripts, the fourth conversation and Julia's 16th comment. Jason's journal is referenced (JsJ14) with the Js indicating Jason and J# indicating the number of the journal entry. My journal is similarly referenced as (SzJ5). In consideration of all of the "J's" in this method, for ease of reading, Jason's remarks are italicized while Julia's appear in the same font as the text.

Berliner's (1994) five-stage model of teacher development and Hatton and Smith's (1995) corresponding hierarchy of reflective behaviour provide the framework for this exploration. Both tools have proved useful in describing the starting point as well as the progress these teachers have made over the school year. Although it is convenient to have these labels and stages to attach to Julia and Jason's behaviours, concerns, and

developing skills, these descriptions should be seen as a method of establishing shared

meanings for this discussion and not as a final summation of their professional

development (see Appendix C for definitions). The individual histories, personalities,

and experiences of both Julia and Jason are more complex than a one- or two-word

category implies. As well, the assumption in both models is that progress is linear, which

has not proven to be the case with either of these teachers.

Overview of the Study

The remaining chapters in this study present, in chronological order, the year's

journey that Jason and Julia traveled in the first year of teaching. It is important to keep in

mind that this work chronicles the experiences, opinions, and perceptions of these two

teachers, and as such it is not meant to speak for all beginning teachers. Chapter 2

outlines the basic themes in the literature and the role that experience, knowledge, and

reflection are thought to play in the development of the beginner's image as teacher and

his or her corresponding ability to understand and meet the expectations of teaching. The

research literature indicates that the degree to which these components are addressed by a

preservice program, in isolation and in unison, determines the novice's ability to perceive,

predict, and cope with the situational elements of everyday classroom life.

Chapter 3 reflects on the challenges that tackling a qualitative research study

presented because it is a format that lacks many of the "fixed regulations" (Lincoln, 1995,

p. 275) found in other forms of inquiry. The absence of preordained formulas and

formats was initially inviting, but this lack of structure soon turned troublesome as

unexpected obstacles and challenges threatened the progress of the project. This chapter

focuses on overcoming these stumbling blocks on the way to creating and maintaining the participant relationships crucial to an honest and authentic telling of Julia's and Jason's stories. Unlike the methods section of a more traditional form of report, this section relates the "how" and the "why" of the research process, without which this story could only offer an unsupported "what."

Chapter 4 returns to Jason's and Julia's direct experiences as it assesses the quality of their preservice years in light of the components identified in the literature review--experience, knowledge, and reflection. The resulting self-images created through their programs are also discussed, as they provided the lens through which these teachers interpreted and approached their classrooms in September. Chapter 5 explains how this preparation and self-image assisted the teachers in coping with the realities of daily teaching in their specific school context. This chapter ends with the skills both teachers developed and the lessons learned in first-year practice.

Chapter 6 illustrates how Julia and Jason used these experiences to reconcile and re-evaluate their initial images of self as teacher; moreover, it depicts the major events that precipitated change. Chapter Seven returns to the teachers' overall perception of the quality and content of their preservice programs and presents some of the suggestions Jason and Julia offered to describe their ideal preparation experience. This final chapter also provides the opportunity to summarize the research and consider other recommendations and successful attempts to confront and narrow the gap between preparation and practice.

CHAPTER 2

THEMES IN THE LITERATURE:

FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Is the beginner's predicament avoidable or inevitable? As the literature does not

specifically speak to the issue of the quality of preservice preparation, this review focuses

on factors and conditions that promote or prevent the novice's professional growth. These

factors and conditions fall into two broad categories: (a) those areas in preservice

programs that are seen as central to the effective preparation of beginning teachers, and

(b) the situational factors that affect and test this preparation in the novice's first teaching

position. The first category includes the role of experience, the role of knowledge, and

the role of reflection.

The Role of Experience

It is generally agreed that extensive and varied classroom experiences can

accelerate the novice's growth toward "expert" pedagogy (McDermott, Gormley,

Rothenberg, & Hammer, 1995). Similarly, Kagan's (1992) review of 40 learning-to-teach

studies concludes that extended interaction with pupils is essential if beginners are to

make appropriate planning, implementation, and assessment decisions. Calderhead

(1989) explains that it is not possible for a novice to successfully devise curricular units

for any age group of students without an acquired understanding of their behaviour

patterns, interests, responses to activities, and the range of their abilities. (See also

Etheridge, 1989; Goodman, 1987; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Schempp, Tan, Manross, &

Fincher, 1998; van Manen, 1991).

Berliner's (1994) five-stage model of professional growth is particularly useful in this discussion of the effect of experience on the progression from novice to advanced beginner, with the understanding that experience will not teach everyone equally well as it is a "necessary but not sufficient condition for expertise" (Berliner, 1987, p. 60). One can accumulate weeks, months, and sometimes years of relevant experience without learning from it. Mere exposure to a variety of students, teachers, and situations may have little effect if the teacher is developmentally unwilling or unable to see this environment through the eyes of a teacher. For the practicum to be a rich growth and preparatory experience, the beginner must be assisted in connecting, applying, and assessing the theoretical lessons learned at the university with the actions of a teacher in the classroom. Without "a means to make explicit and subject to collaborative reflection and examination that which is typically tacit and unarticulated–the cognitive processes underlying teaching practices," (Ethell & McMeniman, 2000, p. 90), the candidate's time in schools remains framed in the student-like context of observation and imitation, making him or her truly a student-teacher. One of the major themes of the data provided by Julia and Jason is that the words of their preservice years lacked the power to drive their earliest moves as teachers because their personal teaching experiences did not allow them to give those words full meaning. In this way, the faculty and the school remained separate entities, with the teacher candidates left to forge ahead in each arena unaware that this separation reinforces the invisible gap between pedagogical thinking and experiential understanding.

The Role of Knowledge

"The myth persists that anyone with subject matter knowledge can teach. That belief shows both ignorance and arrogance" (Berliner, 1987, p. 77). Without question, beginning teachers need subject matter knowledge, but differing conceptions of what constitutes "knowledge" have led to the exclusion of some forms and the overemphasis of others in teacher preparation. What do beginning teachers really need to "know" to teach successfully, to continually develop a practical knowledge base, and to interact confidently in their classrooms? How much of what they really need to know can be learned in a preservice program?

"Novice teachers should not be cheated out of learning a cornucopia of rules of thumb, techniques, skills, knacks, models, theories, etc. that can furnish them with a rich and an effective body of knowledge" (van Manen, 1995, p. 48). What van Manen and others (Berliner, 1994; Calderhead, 1989; Kagan, 1992; Spafford, 1987) are describing is a body of knowledge that integrates classroom management, instructional techniques, and cognitive and metacognitive skills with knowledge of students and subject matter. However, what van Manen and others do not make explicit is that without an appropriate teacher frame of reference in which to interpret these skills and tools, the cornucopia is in danger of being misunderstood, misread, or ignored.

To be successful, teachers need to draw upon an integrated understanding of pupils, process, and curriculum to guide their teaching and to generate new knowledge from their observations and analysis of practice. This cycle cannot start itself, so candidates need explicit assistance in connecting theoretical tools and techniques to their

practicum classrooms, and in evaluating the results, if they are to successfully use what they have learned in practice to engage in "anticipatory reflection" (van Manen, 1991, p. 101). This ability to put practical knowledge to use by making informed decisions in the planning stages to create appropriate procedures, routines, and better lessons demonstrates the degree to which the candidate is thinking and interacting beyond an imitative image of teaching. Such an ability to pre-determine the "what" of teaching makes it possible for the teacher to move away from the self-absorbed focus of the novice to the self-forgetful level exhibited when competent teachers become absorbed by their students and the act of teaching. The automaticity that begins to develop at this stage allows teachers the cognitive time and space to discriminate the unique from the ordinary in the continuous creation and refinement of a personal, practical knowledge base.

> My practical knowledge 'is' my felt sense of the classroom, my feeling who I am as a teacher, my felt understanding of my students, my grasp of the things that I teach, the mood that belongs to my world at school, the hallways, the staffroom, and of course this classroom. (van Manen, 1995, p. 46)

Although implementation and assessment skills are fundamental to the beginner's knowledge base, teacher candidates should also understand that differing curricular perspectives exist and that they are not all equally created. For example, the work of Eisner and Vallance (1973), later up-dated by Vallance (1986), demonstrates how differing conceptions of the priorities and purposes of education become woven into the fabric of curriculum. Teachers must be cognitively aware of these differences in order to look past the current educational or political curricular bandwagons to determine what

messages and values are embodied in the material they are being told to teach. Such a

critical perspective presumes that teaching requires knowledge and skills that go beyond

learning how to cover the curriculum to uncovering the moral and social configuration

that it perpetuates. "While the neophyte teachers may not be able to act upon such

knowledge immediately, it gives them a mind set to inform their deliberations about

teaching" (Zumwalt, 1989, p. 182). Developing such a mind set is particularly relevant

now that the goals and values of the market place have infiltrated curriculum

development and testing practices, causing knowledge to be packaged and presented as a

consumable item (Diamond, 1991; van Manen, 1991). Without such a critical

perspective the beginner is in danger of becoming a technician, a dispenser of prescribed

curriculum with the ability to move within it, but not beyond it.

The Role of Reflection

"Reflection [is] a necessary but not sufficient condition for professional

development" (Day, 1993, p. 83). As with experience and knowledge, reflective thinking

in and of itself is not the missing link between preparation and practice, but it is an

essential element. Reflecting on experience can be the best teacher for those with little

experience (Berliner, 1987), particularly if it leads to the creation of a thought-action

process that facilitates the navigation of the classroom through the beginner's continuous

acquisition and application of practical knowledge.

Hatton and Smith's (1995) hierarchy defining the stages that characterize the

development of reflective thought situates the beginner at the technical-rational

("lowest") level, the step that is concerned with self and survival. Kagan (1992) suggests

that this is the necessary focus for the novice's attention as reflection must be inward, tuned to one's own behaviour and beliefs to reconcile the image of self-as-teacher before issues that directly involve students can be considered.

These studies also conclude that beginners do not have the necessary experience or corresponding ability to discriminate appropriate information from background noise. Without this situational body of knowledge from which to draw alternative courses of action and without the language of education to communicate their observations, the novice's reflective thinking is at best surface, misguided, and unproductive (Berliner, 1994; Calderhead, 1989). When novices have had the opportunity to define and refine their image of self-as-teacher through extended experience and the acquisition of relevant knowledge and when they have developed some awareness of their impact upon students, then they are cognitively equipped for the reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action stages (Hatton & Smith, 1995; van Manen, 1995).

Not all of the literature agrees with this position in the hierarchy and its expectations for the reflective capabilities of beginning teachers. At the other end of the spectrum are those who report on beginning teachers' advanced ability to reflect at the critical and in-action levels (Etheridge, 1989; Kwo, 1996; Munby & Russell, 1989; Spafford, 1987). Whether reflection is viewed as a cognitive activity reserved for the trip home on the bus or as achievable in the thick of classroom action, beginners cannot simply be instructed on the merits of becoming a reflective practitioner and then left to artificially or superficially intuit the thought processes and appropriate actions that characterize this cycle. Certain factors appear to be important if meaning is to be made

from experience in an authentic and enduring way. The presence or absence of these

conditions could explain the discrepancies in the literature surrounding the ability and

level of reflective practice in beginning teachers. The studies reviewed here indicate that:

(a) critical peers are instrumental in establishing reflective behaviour in novice

teachers,

(b) constructive conversations with an experienced colleague or mentor help

maintain reflective thinking processes and also assist in the generation and

implementation of new ideas and teaching strategies (Day, 1993; Etheridge, 1989;

Goodman,1987; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Kane, 1991; Kwo, 1996; McDermott,

Gormley, Rothenberg, & Hammer, 1995; Spafford, 1987),

(c) the development of a practical base of knowledge is necessary to gain some

independence in reflective practice (Berliner, 1994; Calderhead, 1989; Spafford,

1987; van Manen, 1995),

(d) for reflective behaviour to survive past the initial tumultuous years, novices

must be exposed to experienced colleagues using reflection to improve and refine

their own practices (Eraut, 1995; van Manen, 1995), and

(e) even if beginners are not able to move beyond self and survival issues, their

preservice program should introduce them to the moral, social, and ethical issues

inherent in critical reflective practice (Day, 1993; Diamond, 1991; Hatton &

Smith, 1995; van Manen, 1995; Zeichner, 1996).

Summarizing the Literature

Candidates come to faculties of education with personal beliefs about classrooms and students along with images of themselves as teachers based on their experiences as students. This apprenticeship-of-observation (Lortie, 1975, p. 65) frames, interprets, and defines their knowledge and informs their initial classroom interactions as well as their imitative and idealized images of self-as-teacher (Ethell, 1999; Kagan, 1992; Knowles, 1992). Ideally, preservice programs would then provide them with rich and diverse teaching experiences, skills, and the content needed to evaluate and create the "what" of teaching as well as the opportunity to make sense of all of this by challenging their pre-existing views concerning the role of teachers. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to establish dialogues with reflective and proficient practitioners in which the intentions behind classroom practices are made explicit to the beginner. Without such an in-depth and up-front approach, novices will continue to "[model] behaviours that appeared to work, rather than having an understanding of the thinking underlying the teachers' actions" (Ethell & McMeniman, 2000, p. 91). From this informed yet beginner's perspective, the novice would then be able to understand and interpret the teaching context and meet its demands through a teacher's lens with the appropriate basic skills, structures, and management strategies. The ultimate and immediate test of the extent to which the novice's program has met these challenges is his or her first contract teaching position.

Preparation Meets Practice

Despite successful B.Ed. assignments and practica reports, the day will come when beginners stand alone in front of their "own" classes. It is then that preparation is put to the only test that really matters: can they teach these students? It is here, where the ability to collect pizza money, register book orders, take attendance, hear homework excuses, and get the class to the French teacher in under five minutes, that candidates, whether ready or not, become teachers. It is also here, in daily practice, that the quality of their preservice preparation is continually tested in the face of the following factors:

(a) students' behaviour, individual needs, and motivation,

(b) teaching context, including colleagues, principal, parents, and sometimes the larger community,

(c) teaching assignment, particularly if it is not within subject or grade certification, as well as extra-curricular responsibilities, and the workload, and

(d) volume of prescribed curriculum material to be covered (Corcoran, 1981; Etheridge, 1989; Goodman, 1987; Kagan, 1992; Kane, 1991; Ryan, 1970; Spafford, 1987; Veenman, 1984).

As the research suggests, these situational factors will directly affect the beginner's ability to translate preparation into practice. The extent to which the ideal model of preparation presented in this section speaks to the reality of Julia and Jason's experiences becomes evident in the following chapters. Before their stories can be told, the extent to which the ideal model of participant research characterized this study must first be addressed.

CHAPTER 3

PUTTING THE PROPOSAL INTO PRACTICE

Establishing the Participant Relationship

"Relationships between researcher and practitioner can be fruitful endeavors,

provided they are nurtured in atmospheres of trust and openness, places where risk-taking

and reflection are carefully encouraged and sought" (Spafford, 1987, p. 57). As

Spafford's (1987) work details, the connection that develops when attention is paid to

establishing a dialectical relationship among researcher and participants can lead to a rich,

informative experience for all involved. This partnership asks participants to take an

active role in deciphering their views of practice using reflections, personal concerns, and

questions to guide the direction of the inquiry. This relationship sounded easy to achieve

in the accounts of similar research, but it turned out to be more difficult in practice. Jason

and Julia are different people and teachers with diverse life experiences.

Julia's undergraduate degree is in environmental studies with a minor in physical

geography. She completed a teaching degree in the consecutive program immediately

following her undergraduate education, entering her first year of teaching at the age of 24.

At this point in her life Julia does not have the additional responsibility or experience of

parenting to bring to her practice, nor did she have to re-locate to an unfamiliar city to

begin her teaching career.

Julia participated in a unique program structure that placed her in a primary

classroom for the entire first term of school, interrupted briefly by a two-week return to

the university. She was enthusiastic about our study from the beginning and eager to

share her first-year experiences. From our first telephone conversation I was struck by

her positive approach and deep compassion for future students. Julia was most concerned

that her classroom would be a fun, welcoming, and safe place and she had many ideas for

incorporating her musical and creative talents into her program. After my first meeting

with Julia I wrote:

> She talked about concrete things, how to get a survival structure into her class
>
> from day one and the necessity of not coming across as [the students'] best friend.
>
> She showed a tremendous amount of compassion for the situation and was not
>
> angry or resentful about the coming challenge. Julia oozes enthusiasm and
>
> buoyancy, she's very excited, very together, no wonder she got hired! If she can't
>
> survive her first year, who could? (SzJ1)

Where Julia spent our pre-school meetings talking mostly about the students and what she

would try to do for them, Jason spoke mostly about

> his determination to maintain himself in the grind of teaching. This is who [the
>
> school board] hired, a reflective, critical, artistic teacher who is determined to be
>
> true to his ideals and his journey. Will he get that opportunity or will he turn into
>
> someone that they didn't hire? (SzJ4)

What also struck me in our first conversations was Jason's disdain and outright dismissal

of the "stuff" of teaching. Two days before school started he could not understand why

colleagues were "madly photocopying stuff, curriculum, because it is just stuff. He's not

at all concerned with what he will say and do in the next few days" (SzJ4). Rather, he saw

it as his job to ensure "his students develop an attitude and ability to approach and survive

their lives" (SzJ3).

Jason considers himself to be first and foremost an environmental and experiential educator. He is a geographer who has worked in the provincial conservation area in three different park systems and conducted earth studies classes around the world. *"It wasn't about being a teacher, it was about teaching people to have a relationship with the world that they live in"* (Js3J131). Jason pursued this practice following the completion of his undergraduate degree in environmental studies and geography with a parks option. By virtue of these experiences, when he decided to become a teacher he applied for and was accepted into the Outdoor and Experiential Education option in a Bachelor of Education program (see Appendix A for a brief description) and began his teaching career at the age of 26. Jason also does not yet have the additional responsibility or experience of being a parent to bring to his teaching practice. He re-located to this city, by choice, a year before beginning to teach.

Jason's personal inclination towards reflective thought and continual self-evaluation was met and enhanced by his program's emphasis on reflection and developing critical peer relationships. He keeps a journal, thinks about his professional life constantly, and seeks out people who can help him in the areas that he has identified as weaknesses. Placing this background beside Jason's approach to classroom teaching left me with the distinct impression that he would either "get blown out of the water, or walk on it" (SzJ4).

Initially I felt that the contrasts and diversity in the participants' approaches to teaching, along with their goals and life experiences, would enhance the scope of this

study. What I had not realized as I recorded these early thoughts and impressions was how deeply these differences would challenge my ability to establish the dialectical relationship that I envisioned as essential to an honest and authentic telling of their stories.

<div align="center">(Mis-)Conceptions of Self as Researcher</div>

Part of the problem was mine. Just as Julia and Jason have their histories and school experiences to negotiate as beginning teachers, "each researcher brings certain frames of reference, goals, biases, and abilities to the research" (Collins, 1992, p. 182). The specters from my own undergraduate courses proved to be tenacious little ghosts. I was introduced to The Research Process by Psychology professors with serious white-coat envy. During the four years of my B.A./B. Ed education they steadfastly maintained that good researchers had no opinions or biases, and personal goals must be masked throughout any project as a threat to objectivity. Consequently, through many hours dedicated to the rat-in-a-box series of experiments, I cultivated a detached and "focalistic" (Suransky, 1982, p. 37) approach to research.

Understandably, this background left some residue on my conception of research, teaching, and my vision of "self" in the role of researcher. Despite exposure over the past four years to the concepts behind action research and to the idea that qualitative study is not reserved for those who cannot do *real* research, I have had difficulty describing my position on the research continuum beyond the weak admission that it is not quantitative. Stepping out of the positivistic box is one thing, knowing where to go next or how to get there is quite another.

Negotiating a Relationship

With Julia, I initially thought that I knew what I was doing. From our first telephone conversation, she openly shared her enthusiasm, concerns, classroom, and experiences in an effort to convey in detail her life as a first-year teacher. Conversely, Jason entered into this equation with a fixed perception of me as researcher and himself as the researched. He was suspicious about my request to spend time in his classroom and he treated attempts to make casual telephone contact (to see how his early days were going) as a form of data collection. While he focused on trying to track and tally the direct questions asked, I was attempting to have a conversation. Jason's determination to remain a "subject" and mine to make him less of a "rat" became a constant source of unrest as I tried to make my vision of relational research a reality.

Just as this dilemma was unfolding, I encountered another quandary when I observed the early discipline and structural difficulties running through Julia's class, making it virtually impossible for her to be heard, let alone understood. While she was trying to teach science with a positive, non-confrontational, hands-on approach, students were wandering in and out and around the room, talking constantly with each other. The girls at the back used the lesson time to re-polish their nails and try out new make-up and perfume combinations, while the boys at the back maintained all out ruler warfare that eventually escalated to scissors. Another boy tossed and caught a baseball the entire time, while a collection of three debated back and forth to determine if Derek was a loser or just too stupid to live. In the middle of all of this chaos there was a fire drill and, upon return, the group totally lost all self-control to the extent that even the three students who

had been listening joined the rest of the class. Inevitably, I asked myself, "Now what do I do? Am I here merely to observe and hand out science equipment while I watch her get eaten alive or do I say something to help her out?"

A Moment to Retreat and Re-Think

During this period of uncertainty, the white coats came back to haunt me as I reexamined my role and how it affected the drawing of the line between investigating, interfering (or worse, annoying them both), and contaminating. I struggled to articulate my place in the process, to better know how to deal with Julia and how to present myself to Jason.

I began with Julia. Even though, in baptism-by-fire terms, Julia was living in a war zone and the cavalry was nowhere in sight, she did not ask explicitly for my help. She invited me into her classroom to get to know her kids. Julia also appeared to be caught up in the paradox of not knowing yet needing to appear as if she did know. Like many beginning teachers (myself included), this desire to appear in control and competent ("After all, I am the teacher!") makes asking for assistance seem like a sign of weakness or failure (Corcoran, 1981). Recognizing this led to the realization that my response should be seen as supportive and in no way evaluative, which curbed my reflexive urge to jump in and start giving consultant-type directives and specific strategies for dealing with the challenges she was facing. Instead, I went the route of external encouragement (in the form of phone calls and e-mails) as well as offering resources, references, and sharing curriculum units. The changes Julia instituted on her own and the open relationship we developed suggest that this has been an acceptable course of action.

In contrast to Julia, Jason's self-confidence makes it possible for him to ask for assistance when he sees his own needs and the needs of his students not being met. This demeanor proved to be the stepping stone away from my assigned role as bean counter to a more "relational" research plateau. While talking about a previous visit to his classroom, where students were in the planning stages for their "self-providing projects" (learning to do woodwork, sewing, and cooking in a pioneer context), I offered Jason fabric scraps from my collection for the sewing group's practice runs. In response, he jumped from mittens to his thoughts for the upcoming Remembrance Day assembly. I was thinking of the traditional wreath presentation and formulating the ways I knew to make fabric poppies when he clarified his thoughts about Remembrance Day and the place of fabric:

> *I posed it to my class and I supported it with this song. When we think about Remembrance Day we think about people who were physically hurt. But a lot of people have maimed hearts and maimed minds and broken spirits, and they live with this. And they have bad dreams, so they might have come back physically safe but the rest of them is broken. . . I would like to make a quilt, because often a quilt is bits and pieces of happy things in your life and good thoughts. I thought, how can you ever have bad dreams when you're surrounded with this blanket of love? It's like this protective shield. So hopefully we'll be able to do that. But I need fabric. (Js1J159-Js1J160)*

Jason also needed the bits and pieces to decorate each quilt square and someone to sew the squares together. Here is where the relationship was transformed. With a basement

full of fabric and personal experience as a dressmaker and designer, I supplied what he needed pre-cut and ready to go. The quilt was completed before Remembrance Day, and the students began calling me the quilt lady. This event led to my appearances on some Thursday afternoons to help the cooking group with its projects, and these interactions provided opportunities for me to get to know the students. Moreover, this newfound relationship permitted us to interact outside the restaurant atmosphere, with a tape recorder between us. On common ground and sharing the experiences that transpire regularly in such a school, we were able to circumvent the researcher/researched roles, and Jason began speaking to me as a colleague who shared the difficulties of teaching these students.

Evidence of our progress appeared later in the year when Jason invited me to the school's Christmas luncheon. I thought this was an innovative approach to the volunteer tea, but I arrived to find it was a special event solely for the Grade 7 and 8 classes and their teachers. The students and Jason thought I might like to be included, a touching gesture. After delivering Christmas treats to both classes, Jason invited me in to watch him open the gifts students had given him, and when it was time to leave, he asked if we couldn't stay longer and visit with the kids. As I had my two-year-old daughter with me, that was a welcome but impractical idea. However, these events were a watershed in our relationship because Jason's shift in attitude revealed that he understood that my interest as a researcher and a fellow teacher extended beyond *just* the completion of my thesis and that he was not a subject to be observed.

This vignette should not be interpreted to imply that everything is perfect. There

is still a bit of an edge to Jason, even at this stage when we meet in restaurants, but in the classroom he treats me as a teaching peer. My final visit to Julia's room left me wondering if I could have helped more with some of the structural and management issues. However, as the year progressed, it became obvious that Julia and I have different approaches to pedagogy as well as different classroom priorities. Furthermore, she was happy, felt successful with the student relationships, and proud of her progress. At this point I remind myself that I was not striving for perfection but for a relationship that was fruitful, open, and trusting in order to give voice to Julia and Jason's first-year experiences.

As the year has unfolded it has become apparent that every teacher with whom I've discussed this topic has a first-year story to tell. To this point, I have yet to hear a positive or encouraging tale from the (approximately) 20 educators who have shared their thoughts and experiences. Most of what I heard involves the growth process of the first few years of teaching, as well as "if only I'd known" comments. From this experienced perspective the events and trials of the first year can be interpreted through teacher's eyes and set against the background of "what I now know." Jason and Julia did not have such a retrospective lens to look beyond their own personal trials and challenges. As it has been the intention of this study, from the very beginning, to take seriously the issues and concerns of first-year teachers, their experiences, comments, and perceptions have been accepted at face value. Although it is possible to speculate about other reasons or

circumstances that could have contributed to the dilemmas these teachers faced, such

suggestions should in no way diminish or discount Julia's and Jason's perceptions of their

experiences.

CHAPTER 4

EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE, AND REFLECTION

The Elements of Preservice Preparation

Just as the literature made the participant research relationship seem like a given, it also neatly divided experience, knowledge, and reflection into three tidy categories for purposes of discussing the growth of beginning teachers. I naturally expected that Julia and Jason's preservice experiences would be just as easily categorized and examined to further understand the extent to which each element helped or hindered professional development. Focusing on the three elements from the start would make it possible to weave back and forth as new insights were gained through reflection about how the knowledge and classroom experiences from their faculty's programs were being utilized and expanded upon during this first year. Naturally, this would gently and logically flow into the next section, the teachers' perceptions of the quality of their preservice programs.

This idea proved to be unworkable for two reasons. First, from the beginning of the school year both participants informed me that they had gained little of direct value in any of the three areas (experience, knowledge, and reflection) during their time at the faculty. Jason and Julia found that they could not apply their practica experiences and the pedagogical material offered to current teaching situations. Instead of reflecting upon current practice and drawing from their practica and theoretical knowledge base to solve problems and plan programs, they worked to make up for the skills and knowledge they lacked. This situation intensified over the year as many new and unfamiliar challenges confronted Jason and Julia. Unable to modify and move forward, they found themselves

struggling to identify what they did not know or could not do, then deciding how best to fill in the gaps–a difficult task.

Second, I discovered that the degree to which experience, knowledge, and reflection become interrelated, as they join to form into practical knowledge, makes it difficult to talk about growth in one area without discussing the other two categories simultaneously. A corresponding challenge was the task of separating the presence or absence of this experiential understanding from discussion of its impact on the beginner's evolving identity as teacher. Having said that, I attempt, in a rather artificial, hermeneutic way, to separate experience, reflection, and knowledge, and address how each component affected the development of Jason and Julia's limited practical knowledge base. Returning this trilogy to its whole makes it possible to see the connection between this limited pedagogical base and these teachers' unchallenged images as classroom teachers.

The Role of Experience

The dividing and defining factor between the issues Julia had to confront and those that Jason grappled with proved to be the different experiences they brought to their preservice years rather than the different experiences they gathered during this time. Although Jason met his first class with little traditional teaching to draw from, *"You know how many days I've taught in a classroom by myself?"* . . . *"Since I've been hired"* (Js1J40-Js1J41), he had extensive experience in the park system as well as in conflict situations working with students ranging from young children to adults. From the time I spent in his classroom in the fall and winter, it was evident that he had the scourge of most beginners in hand: discipline. There was never any question that he was in control

of the situation. Jason's priority was to develop respect, sense of safety, and community

because experience in environmental programs had provided him with a strong

foundation in this area.

> *I'm not going to do drama and dance in term one because it's not a safe place to*
>
> *do drama and dance. Based on the idea of sequencing risk and safety and the*
>
> *idea of building a community, I left the harder stuff until the end.* (Js2J40)

Using his experiences as an as environmental educator in consort with his personal

beliefs, Jason created this safe place around the ideas of the Ojibway clan system. He

saw his role in this structure not as leader but as the person who maintains safety and

balance, and Jason approached the students and program from this perspective. His

persistence in creating this environment was visible in the changes in the students'

attitudes and behaviour over the course of the first term. The insults, persistent noise, and

lack of co-operation among students that I initially observed were replaced by a calmer

atmosphere in which the majority of students arrived from lunch recess and quietly read

or completed assignments before moving on to work groups. Where I had seen grabbing

and fighting to be the one to stir the batter or chop the vegetables, later in the year my

group sat to work, cleaned up without being asked, and ensured among themselves that

everyone had the opportunity to participate. Any rude or outrageous actions were no

longer tolerated by the students, and each made it a point to welcome me to the room

when I arrived and to thank me for coming when I left.

Julia's primary practica background and her desire to be a fun-and-friendly

teacher led her to take a slightly different approach with students. Although she valued

the idea of establishing a community structure in her classroom to meet the social needs

of the group, she had no experience in creating this type of atmosphere. Julia had read

about the Tribes community-building program, so she decided to implement it.

Unfortunately, she did not have the experience or the insight to thoroughly evaluate its

effectiveness in this teaching context. Tribes is intended for younger students in a

different school setting as it is full of warm "fuzzies" (both literally and figuratively), as

well as inappropriate activities.

Although Julia remained appreciative and enthusiastic about the in-class exposure

she received during her first practicum as in, "I'm so fortunate that I was there the first

day of school until Christmas. I wish we could have done that all year, it totally made

sense" (Ju5J43), this did not translate into a smooth start to her own practice. Julia was

plagued by the structural and discipline problems that typify the life of many beginning

teachers. She could not see the connection between her teacher candidate experiences

and the theoretical material offered at the faculty and the reality of her first classroom.

This incongruence was due in part to the unfamiliar intermediate grade level and inner-

city context, but it also occurred because the practicum did little to change her self-image

created through observation, leaving her unable to fully comprehend the role from a

teacher's perspective. She could not identify through teacher's eyes the general structures

and procedures present in the Grade 3 placement that could transfer to her own

classroom.

At the beginning of the year I had a billion ideas. "Oh yeah we're going to do this and this for sure!" I still have those ideas because I haven't done those things. And eventually I'll get to them, when I have more of an idea about what kind of teacher I am. (Ju4J116)

I've never really had to deal with being a disciplinarian or being someone who has authority. . . That's what I prepared for all summer, saying "Okay, you have to lay it on the line and not let things slide. And be firm regardless of whether or not that student is going to hate me for the day." (Ju1J3)

Julia had every intention of starting in September with a firm hand and a structured program, but a lack of experience and knowledge of what approaches would and would not work created the difficulties and discipline issues that plagued her first year. When everything is a new experience, it is hard to know what to attend to, how to plan if you have no idea what to expect next, or how to define and achieve your place in this chorus. Being told to be firm or deciding to "lay it on the line" is a useful first step; being able to structure a program that institutes and maintains firmness is a more complex challenge. Julia's first set of classroom rules clearly demonstrated why telling novices "what" is not the same as teaching them "how."

I have four classroom rules, attentive listening, mutual respect, the right to pass, and another one which is related to the mutual respect. I thought they were all encompassing and the whole thing can be summed up by respect. Respect one another. (Ju1J9)

Beyond simply writing these rules on the blackboard, Julia had no strategies for helping

students achieve this end. Consequently, the events of the first week quickly changed

these lofty, out-of-reach goals to:

1. Signed planners every night, and

2. Respect of paper (none on the floor, no wasting, recycle).

Where Jason was able to draw on his experiences as an environmental educator to begin

situating himself as a classroom teacher, Julia could not translate her practica experiences

into this teaching context. Even though she was in a classroom for four months, much of

this time only served to extend her apprenticeship of observation: "In my practicum I

taught two full days" (Ju4J124). Granted, there is a difference between the divisions, but

there also exist skills and structural procedures that are transferrable. Consequently, Julia

fell back on her own experiences as an intermediate student and the practices of a

favourite Grade 6 teacher to model assignments and assessment strategies.

The Role of Knowledge

Although Jason knew the steps and stages involved in creating a safe atmosphere

and establishing respect for others, he was left with many dilemmas around the task of

daily teaching. "*I've fought tooth and nail to make that room into something, and now if I

could only teach them stuff*" (Js3J96). In Jason's opinion, his preservice courses did not

extend his community building and management strengths by providing a variety of

instructional and organizational techniques or the cognitive and metacognitive skills

required to plan, implement, and assess curricula.

I have to do 3 strands of math because I've done 2 strands of math thoroughly, well relatively thoroughly, probably not efficiently enough but thoroughly. I can only be so efficient because I don't know what I'm doing in a lot of cases. I have a pretty administratively heavy heart right now and I just feel a lot of stuff piling up. (Js2J47)

I don't know how to mark, that's for sure. Teaching's one thing but what's this evaluating part? (Js2J83)

I don't know how to look at the math and the language. And that's a weakness for me as a teacher. I'm very good with words, but I don't know how to break it down into its basic components. And that's my job as the teacher, to know how to do that. (Js1J141)

Julia also felt that she was not able to cope with the "what" of daily teaching. She found herself looking beyond preservice preparation for ways to devise a system for assessing students, and she described how she settled on a method as something she just "pulled out of my pants somehow, I don't know from where" (Ju2J41). These techniques were refined and revised over the course of the year as some proved unusable and some generated far too much data, leaving Julia overwhelmed when it came time to organizing for report cards.

Similarly, the actual content of her language program did not originate in the faculty's teachings but from ideas she gleaned from her own "awesome" Grade 6 teacher. Beyond these activities and assignments there were still aspects of the language curriculum that she was expected to teach but lacked sufficient knowledge to confidently

communicate.

> How do you teach someone to write a complete sentence? We never learned the
> parts of speech in teacher's college. How do you teach what a noun is? How do
> you teach what the parts of a sentence are? What's a clause, when do you use
> commas, how do you use quotation marks? (Ju3J125)

Julia's inability to understand the math curriculum created another struggle. "The night before I'm plowing through the textbook trying to figure out what these concepts actually mean" (Ju3J36). She compensated for this lack of knowledge by taking a six-week math course offered in the evenings by her school board.

These teachers' lack of knowledge about students, subject matter, and teaching techniques and structures meant that instead of refining, reflecting, and expanding their experiential understanding of teaching, as well as their self-images, they started creating a practical knowledge base with each passing day of the school year. Indeed, this was the only way they could develop experiential awareness of the things they thought they had learned about teaching in a preservice program. As their concerns moved from keeping up with the curriculum to dealing with the students, and to the many administrative and assessment tasks, the gaps in their knowledge bases were filled through trial and error. From this pace and perspective it is hard to do more than react and focus upon the immediate demands of the moment, an exhausting way to teach. *" I don't know if I'm coming or going sometimes. . . And I'm collecting all this stuff. Why am I collecting it? I don't even know what to do with it "* (Js1J172).

The Role of Reflection

"I think and I reflect and I take it apart and I build it all back" (Ja3J179).

Julia found the demands of teaching taxing, keeping her in survival mode for the first term and into the second. This could in part be attributed to the fact that her anticipatory reflection in August had produced ideas that turned out to be unworkable, such as Tribes and Getting-to-Know-You activities. Without adequate knowledge and experiences she could not properly foresee the learning needs, abilities, and attitudes of students.

Furthermore, Julia felt that her preservice program neglected to communicate and develop reflective practice. "[It] had nothing about reflecting on your own teaching, not enough I feel". . . or "the importance of taking time every day to sit by myself when the students are out for recess to write down these things" (JulJ21-JulJ22). Although it is difficult to believe that Julia's program did not, in some way, encourage reflective practice, these comments and impressions express frustrations with her preparation as well as insight into the inability of the beginning teacher to make practical meaning out of the experiences and lessons offered by the university. One of Julia's few criticisms of the school board's workshop events further demonstrated the extent to which her program did not instill, in an experiential way, the tenets of reflection within a peer cohort or the importance of critical friends. She saw the last part of each meeting as irrelevant because people just sat around and talked.

The morning [of the workshop] was a really useful exercise it was really eye-opening, [but] the afternoon was a waste of my time because there was no

structure, we just had to sit in groups and talk. (Ju2J101)

Conversely, Jason found this the most important aspect as it gave people time to reflect together about teaching.

> *What's really good [is that] they save [themselves] emotionally each day at the*
>
> *end of the day because we sit back and we talk and we actually have pretty good*
>
> *de-briefs along the table.* (Js1J56)

Again, the differences in what Julia and Jason brought to their practices can be traced primarily to their previous experiences. Jason's pre-school thoughts set reflection as a priority: "The other [goal] is to become a critical and reflective practitioner" (JsJ3). It can be argued that Jason's reflective practice was enhanced and nurtured by his Outdoor and Experiential Education program, but the point remains that Jason arrived at the faculty with firmly established reflective skills and practices already in place.

Consequently, Jason thrived in this aspect of his program and started his own practice with a circle of critical peers already established and with a firm stance about the moral business of teaching that met and surpassed the essential conditions (outlined in the literature review section) for the success of reflective beginners. This was particularly evident in the extent to which Jason attempted to make sense of his practice within his school context. To achieve this end, he kept a journal and conversed with peers and me in an effort to make the best possible decisions on his students' behalf. In contrast, Julia remarked that she did not have the time to stop and think about teaching until the Christmas break. She found this situation frustrating but beyond her immediate control. At this stage, like many novices, she cited external causes (her preservice program and

the attitude of the workshop leader) for this inability to establish and maintain reflective

practice.

Returning to the Whole

The literature speaks constantly to the necessity for first-year teachers to be

equipped with a wide variety of experiences, tools, techniques, knowledge, skills, and

structures as well as with the reflective capabilities to assess their situations in order to

move confidently within them. In August, Julia and Jason both felt that they were equal

to the task of teaching. It was not until the school year began that they could see the gaps

in their practical knowledge base and began criticizing their programs. In part, this can

be attributed to the novice's inability to make practical and personal sense, through

experience, of the information that was being transmitted in their courses. Still

understanding teaching in the terms of those who have spent a lifetime "sitting back and

watching," they were not assisted in developing the cognitive structures or schema

needed to make meaning out of these words, activities, and theories. Although Jason's

initial view of self as classroom teacher combined his student-based ideas with those of

environmental educator, Julia's initial view was firmly entrenched in observation and

imitation, both as a teacher candidate and former student. Unable to see what was going

up on the overhead or to perceive the depth of thought and decision- making involved in

daily teaching, both teachers were left with an unchallenged perception of the role of

teacher.

Preparation and the Image of Self as Teacher:

The Image that Began the Year

Our image of self as teacher changes with the ages and stages that we pass through on our way to becoming competent teachers, and it changes further for those few who reach the proficient and expert levels. In the earliest phases it involves moving away from the image of teacher that we hold as students, through the fish-out-of-water stage that comes when this image is challenged (by practicum or practice), to that of an advanced beginner, one who has a teacher's understanding of the demands of classroom life. Julia's program "prepared" her to enter the profession as a novice teacher working at the technical level of reflective practice. Her thoughts, out of necessity, centred on self, survival, and filling in the gaps. She began the year's journey with an idealized, imitative image of self as teacher defined by personal qualities. This inadequate or incomplete image and its corresponding view of the task of teaching turned quickly into "self that does not measure up" (as the year unfolded) and then finally to "What will I do as a Grade 8 teacher next year?"

> The people at the school told me to be harsh on the first day, laying it on the line and not accepting anything outside of that, especially at the beginning. The theory was that you lay down the law. . . You mean it and you act on it consistently. I've gone about it in a somewhat different way and it remains to be seen what's going to happen. (JulJ6-JulJ7)

The Tenacious Idealized Student Image

Ultimately, despite Julia's acknowledging in August that strong structure and strict

discipline should be the order of the day, a lay-it-on-the-line teacher was not the image of

self that Julia's preservice experiences had enabled her to create. Consequently she

declined the advice of colleagues and planned a fun Getting-to-Know-You first week of

September to allow the students to ease back into school. As Ethell (1999) reports, this is

fairly common behaviour on the part of the novice teacher, to reject new ideas, no matter

how sound, if they contradict the beginner's preconceptions and beliefs, particularly those

concerning self. Julia's determination to avoid the advice of experienced teachers and go

about teaching in a somewhat different way typifies this novice reaction to divergent

information. This rejection of new or conflicting ideas can also be seen as partially

responsible for a teacher candidate's inability to make sense of the information going up

on the overheads because strongly held beliefs about teaching and self often act as

"unproductive filters" of university coursework (Richards & Killen, 1994, as quoted in

Ethell, 1999, p. 2). There is nothing more personal or tenacious than our own image as

teacher. Giving this up, or admitting that it is based more in our idealized perceptions as

students, takes either early specific workshops at the preservice level to explore these

beliefs or, without such guidance, butting headfirst into the realities of classroom teaching

(Ethell, 1999).

Julia's early goals and priorities also provide insight into her view of self in the

role of teacher. These objectives focused on typical novice issues such as the friend-as-

teacher persona, the all-encompassing, yet pedagogically vague, organizational skills, and

discipline issues.

> The first goal for the year is to become a more organized person, especially as a
>
> teacher. That's my biggest downfall in every school endeavor I've had so far. . . I
>
> have to come to grips with being a teacher and being a friend and the cross
>
> between. I found with the younger kids that it was a lot easier to be their friend
>
> than their teacher. Laying down the law didn't have to happen all that much
>
> because they respected me as a friend. (Jul J1-Jul J2)
>
> That builds into the third goal, which is finding appropriate discipline tactics.
>
> That's really tough, and I feel that it didn't work out for me on the first day.
>
> (Jul J4)

Julia's early unchallenged image reflected those nurturing, affective traits that many

beginning teachers are preoccupied with, apparently believing that "positive personal

attributes would ensure their own success as teachers" (Ethell, 1999, p. 16). When this

does not prove to be the case, it can be a particularly damaging blow to the teacher's ego,

confidence, and self-image.

<u>The Environmental Educator Image</u>

Conversely, Jason approached and defined his role without the affective, nurturing

aspect that Julia saw as the foundation of her image of a teacher.

> *Our relationship is such that I'm not going to be their friend in any way. . . I can*
>
> *be a teacher that does cool, shit, I can't be a cool teacher. I've already decided*
>
> *that. (Js1J27-Js1J28)*
>
> *They don't have to be afraid of me, but they better respect me and know where I'm*

coming from. (Js1J51)

Early in the year, Jason recognized the differences between his and Julia's approach and speculated that it was a gender distinction as Jeff, the other first-year teacher, had an attitude and strategy much the same as Jason's.

> *I care too, I do care a lot, but Julia and I are different, and Jeff too. I don't know if it's a male-female thing but Julia has a nurturing side to her that I don't have. Or if I do I hide it, I make sure that they don't think it's there. And it's a sick game, I don't like doing that.* (Js1J26)

Jason's initial unchallenged image of self in this role was heavily coloured by his experiences as an environmental educator. This image served him well when it came to establishing clear goals for his class and building the community based in the Ojibway clan system that he envisioned for his program.

> *In this community I am the bear. You've got a problem, you do not vigilante-style fix it, I fix it. . . That's my job. I fix the boo-boos and I get rid of the things that cause the boo-boos. As far as your learning goes.* (Js1J80)
>
> *That's not my job everywhere, but that's my job here. In this community, that's who I have to be. You can be then the thinker, or the artist, or the leader. I don't want to be the leader.* (Js1J85)

As mentioned earlier, Jason's highly developed reflective practices and experiences as an educator outside of the classroom put the Hatton and Smith (1995) and Berliner (1994) categories to the test. A novice in some ways in this environment, he is also a competent community builder and geography teacher able to reflect on his role at the in-action and

on-action levels. It is interesting to note though that the aspects of teaching for which his

program was responsible for preparing him are those in which he had to work through the

novice, and at times technical, stages to gain understanding and knowledge in the

integration of past experiences with the role and responsibilities of classroom teacher.

Images and Illumination

As these early unchallenged visions of self as teacher encountered the realities of

teaching, both Jason and Julia underwent transformations. This is a common experience

among beginning teachers, particularly those who enter the profession with implicit

beliefs about teaching and their role in it formed and informed by their "apprenticeship of

observation" (Lortie, 1975) over many years as students and as teacher candidates (Ethell,

1999). Although Jason's perception of self as environmental educator proved to be more

successful than Julia's image of teacher-friend, neither teacher was aware of the

underlying thought processes that comprise classroom-teacher thinking. Without such

cognitive awareness and the experiential understanding of the interplay between the

"how," the "what," and the "why" of teaching, they were not able to see how deeply the

demands of being "the teacher" would reach. Consequently, their foundation of practical

knowledge and the corresponding self-image were not fully equipped to make realistic

anticipatory plans for the coming year. Without the necessary tools, perspectives, and

skills gained through practicum, theory, and the linking of the two, they entered their

classrooms as many new teachers do, unaware of the enormity and variety of the tasks

ahead.

CHAPTER 5

PREPARATION AND SELF-IMAGE MEET PRACTICE

Situational Obstacles and Issues

As outlined in the literature, situational factors test the extent to which beginning

teachers are really prepared to teach: cognitively, experientially, and emotionally.

Understandably all teachers are affected in both positive and negative ways by

interaction with students, colleagues, parents, and curriculum, but beginners are

particularly vulnerable as they are encountering many aspects of these elements for the

first time. Both Julia and Jason sounded confident and equal to the challenge before

school began in September, but then they met their students and the reality of daily

teaching quickly deflated their initial optimism. By highlighting the aspects from each of

the commonplaces that these teachers identified as beyond their comprehension or ability

to cope, it becomes possible to see where preparation, perspectives, and experiences

could not consistently meet the demands of practice. This chapter presents a broad range

of data organized under the categories of students, colleagues, parents, the curriculum,

and administrative tasks of teaching.

The Students

Both teachers were equally unprepared for the needs and personalities of the

students in this school. Jason's class, with a higher proportion of students working to

Individual Education Plans, provided him with many challenges.

Jason's Class

> *I've got to get them there and then I've got to keep them there and then I've got to feed them while they're there and then I've got to make sure they don't kill each other. (Js3J184)*

> *My kids could afford to get more intellectual opportunities if they would afford me the time to be remotely teachable. (Js3J64)*

Jason described his class as loaded with the range of ability stretching from Grade 1 to Grade 9. Further, he described behavioural problems that made the group even more challenging (Js1J46).

> *My class has a really strange enrollment strategy. When I tell teachers who were there last year about the kids in my room, they're looking at me like "holy cow!" (Js1J109)*

> *I have a couple of kids who are venters and I keep them venting here and there throughout the day, which makes me look weak, because why's she always out in the hallway? But if I keep her in here she's going to kill somebody. (Js2J58)*
>
> *There's this cliff, it's really on unstable ground. Some people come in and they run right off. They've had a bad night or a bad morning and it's phew, maybe that's good, maybe you can't be here. Some of you other guys you nudge your way up to the front each day and then you think tomorrow you're starting way back here. And I say, "Dream on." (Js1J193)*

Despite these difficulties, Jason worked to successfully create the community of respectful empowered learners that he set out to build in his pre-September goals. Once

he became fully aware of the reality his students lived outside the classroom, the basics of

ensuring they could provide for themselves took even greater priority over curriculum.

This went beyond cooking and nutrition classes to "health" lessons on the basics of

cleanliness, how to get ready for a date, a positive self-image, and good manners.

> *They're providing, they're giving, they're eating. All kids need to know how to*
>
> *cook for themselves and how to be safe and if no one else is doing it for them,*
>
> *which is the impression I'm under, well then I will.* (Js3J233)
>
> *They need to feel good, they need to come into contact with as many trades and*
>
> *skills and arts as possible, and they need to have it based in success so they can*
>
> *say, "I know how to do this." I've got some of my high flyer guys coming up to*
>
> *me and telling me that they're making dinners for their moms and their aunts,*
>
> *that's pretty great.* (Js3J231)

Tribes Goes Down the Tubes

Julia's experience was not as positive. Despite everyone's advice to come in strong and

lay it on the line and despite her own summer convictions to follow through on this

advice, her nurturing view of self as teacher-friend made it impossible to put these words

into practice. Her first-week plans for building a Tribes community, doing fun activities,

and giving the students some control and voice in determining the curriculum were

quickly replaced by a default return to the 1960s math textbook and some pretty "boring"

pencil and paper review tasks.

> I had a sheet for them to fill out on the first day. The first day, oh my God, all the
>
> sheets I handed out ended up crumpled up on the floor. They tested me so bad, so

disrespectful. (Jul J53)

> On the first day I wanted them to sit in a circle. We'll be able to do a community
> thing, the Tribes book said we could (laughter). Not a chance right now, it's not
> even possible. . . They were sitting in pairs for the first day. They're now in rows
> sitting by themselves. (Jul J85-Jul J86)

Julia also planned a brainstorming session so that she and the students could jointly create the year's gym schedule. Where she had envisioned a teacher and class filling in the giant calender she had made with fun and realistic activities, she got kick boxing, tackle football, and professional wrestling as suggestions. "I'm so stupid, what am I thinking?" (Jul J74). Julia was still thinking in the terms of what she had perceived teaching to be as a student-teacher, trying to implement the resources gathered without the critical ability to evaluate their underlying pedagogical appropriateness for this situation and these students. It took being hit squarely in the face with an experiential in-over-her-head understanding of the requirements of the job and the reality of her students before what she had been told by her colleagues had meaning that she would act on.

> It's pretty scary so I don't know what I'm going to do. . . It was chaos. They were
> running around, there were frisbees everywhere, somebody snuck a football out. I
> lost a frisbee over the fence into someone's yard, we couldn't go get it. I couldn't
> get them to sit down and listen to the rules of the game but we ended up playing
> anyway. And this is a non-contact game, they'd be plowing elbows in heads,
> craziness, throwing grass in each other's face, one kid got grass in the eye.
> (Jul J80)

Julia's class was also full of students working below grade level, several as far as four grades below. This was particularly obvious in the contrast between the students who had been at this school for most of their education and two who transferred from British Columbia. The latter found the work boring and the behaviour of their classmates difficult to endure. Julia recognized the situation but was unable to do anything about it because she had to focus on the boys, who were basically running the room. Beyond the constant chatter, there was also play fighting, using textbooks as weapons, knocking over chairs, playing practical jokes during class, and maintaining a high level of non-academic activity through-out the room. Later in the year, the students were still a source of distress. "The problem is they feed off of each other so much. If it's not that person, it's going to be someone else. Someone always has to cause problems. It changes hands all the time but it's always someone" (Ju4J69).

Julia instituted a variety of behaviour management programs over the course of the year. She realized early on that small candy rewards for answering correctly was not a sustainable practice, "They came to expect it. Where's our prize? " (Ju3J13). Julia also tried slip systems, point systems (lost time), and saving the last half hour for something fun or outdoor sports. The last technique proved to be the most successful with the athletic boys who were trying to control the classroom. She devised these systems on her own or in consultation with her boyfriend. However, a lack of experience with behaviour modification made it difficult to switch tactics and modify schedules before the students became bored and the programs ineffective.

Julia did not have the opportunities, experience, or insight needed to enable her to

have the resources or the ideas in place in September that would have made it easier to be

an efficient and effective teacher from the start. Again, it is one thing to be told about

difficult students and the need to be firm with them, but it is another to experience them

and their lives and to be the one in front of them every day trying to teach, feed, and keep

order.

Although Jason experienced more success with instilling and maintaining a safe

community, this was a constant and mostly uphill battle. When February arrived, "*it's*

wintertime, the kids are freaking out over indoor recesses or they're pulverizing each

other when they're outside " (Js2J47), the effort that it took to keep on top of his students

and deal with their reality on a daily basis caused Jason to fall into a bit of a depression.

> *Every morning it was like playing Russian roulette, spin the barrel, pull the*
>
> *trigger, I guess I'm going into work today. It was awful. It was horrifically bad.*
>
> *The kids are depressed, you're depressed and now we've got different problems.*
>
> *We've got kids who are coming in stoned.* (Js3J203)

In an ideal world, these overloaded and demanding classes would not have been assigned

to first-year teachers. Yet, these placements are not unique to Julia and Jason and thus it

would seem reasonable that preparation programs introduce the possibility of teaching in

an inner-city school. This is not to suggest that every teacher candidate complete a

practicum placement in a challenging school. However, there are journals devoted to

inner-city education, as well as personal accounts in book form, and there is the

possibility of invited guest speakers currently teaching in these circumstances who have a

wealth of experiences and strategies that could be shared. Fortunately, Jason's and Julia's

new colleagues included many teachers who were willing to help them deal with the on-

going realities of their situations.

The Adult Community: Colleagues and Parents

Supportive Staff

The bonding that goes on among staff is just amazing. I'm so fortunate, the school

I was at last year in my placement had none of that... Everyone gets along so

well here. (Ju2J87- Ju2J88)

This staff, to have a whole floor of first-year staff is really good in a lot of ways

because it's not like you're walking around feeling like you don't know anything

and no one's helping you. We're all walking around going, "Holy, what are you

doing today?" (Js1J228)

The feelings of isolation and confusion were diminished because of the support these new

teachers gave each other and received from the majority of the staff. During one of my

visits I sat talking with Julia and Jason in the staffroom at the end of the day. Within

minutes, two veteran teachers joined us to talk, laugh, and tell jokes about their day.

These colleagues went beyond the laughter to share resources as well as management tips

for particular students whom they had previously taught. This camaraderie provided

much needed assistance and professional insight for both Julia and Jason.

Parental Participation

The reactions and encounters that Jason and Julia had with students' parents were

similar and also they were similar to my own first-year experiences in an inner-city

school.

I do not have a working team relationship with these kids' parents. At the same

time I don't know who I can talk to, because if I talk to them and the kid's going to

wind up paying some consequence, well, that's an excuse but. (Js2J126)

But it is also the reality of teaching downtown. I have experienced the ill effects brought

upon a child by my actions. During my first month teaching at an inner-city school I

called home to give a mother good news, for a change, about her usually disruptive and

dangerous son. Immediately, the step-father came to the school, punched the six-year-old

and dragged him out of the building by his hair because the teacher had called home. It

did not matter that I was praising a positive action; rather, the teacher had called home,

and this was cause for punishment.

I'm crazed by my kid's parents. How's that for an issue? Not for my personal

safety, but just for the fact that the last thing I need to do after a bad day is talk to

some wingnut. (Js1J177)

Jason and Julia agreed, however, that there were advantages to teaching in this particular

situation.

Advantages and Accountability

But being at a hard school also has its benefits in that the accountability thing isn't

there. I don't have to provide portfolios for parents. Most of my parents either

don't know how to read or don't care. That gives me the freedom to do what I

think is right in the class. (Ju3J66)

I'm surprised they haven't come after me. I hear these words like evidence and proof and documentation, you need all of this stuff. I just need to show up.

(Js2J124)

But I'm aware of the fact that I'm also not trying very hard to talk to parents.

(Js2J127)

Unlike Jason, Julia tried to make contact with students' parents early in the school year. The first month she sent home a report listing all the assignments given so far and the progress of each student. She did not receive any feedback from the parents. The second month proved more challenging as she found it difficult to keep on top of a system that requires tracking every step in every assignment, particularly with students who generally do not hand in school work. When the October report did not go home on time, "Not a single parent said, "Where's the next one?" It was actually a month and a half before I sent it home" (Ju4J27). Unappreciated by the parents and facing too much work, this system of reporting proved to be an unsustainable practice.

As with Julia's reports, the parents did not respond to the provincial report card's request for feedback. From the pages on which parents are expected to sign, provide comments, and request interviews, Julia received two signed forms, without comments. Although it is the teacher's responsibility to make an effort to collect these pages and have them on file, Julia realized later in the year the futility of this practice "I'm not going to go making all these calls and setting up interview times. Most of them don't answer the phone because they have call display and they see it's the school calling and won't answer" (Ju4J28).

Once again, however, Jason's background, particularly in conflict situations, served him well with one of the few parents who came in to address his child's frequent absences and inability to complete assignments.

We had a parent teacher meeting the other day with an absolute psychopath.
There's this complete wingnut reaming everyone out and yelling in the hall and
all kinds of foolishness. I've always said this, whether it's lifeguarding on the
beach or otherwise, let the psychos yell for 15 minutes and then talk to them when
they're done. (Js3J185)

This encounter only served to further substantiate the impression Julia and Jason had of the students' parents and the wisdom of not putting much effort into unbalancing the status quo.

The issue of parental involvement in inner-city education is a complex topic that reaches beyond the purposes of the present research. The emotional, practical, and often cultural barriers to parental involvement coupled with the rather inaccessible (middle-class) value structure that dictates the ways in which they are expected to be involved in public schools makes the absence of most inner-city parents a regrettable yet inevitable situation (Ascher, 1988; Simoni & Adelman, 1993). As well, the reality that these schools often provide the basics (food, clothes, teaching social skills) of life for many of their students leads to the further abdication of parental responsibility and the widening of the gulf between school and home.

Julia and Jason accepted this lack of communication and participation and, although they saw it in a positive light (they had one less hassle or expectation to meet),

this perception should not reflect negatively on their professionalism. Learning how to converse with parents when they speak the same language (both culturally and socially) and have shared expectations for their children is a difficult skill to master, one that is also not specifically addressed in most preservice programs. Scaling the distance between the inner-city parent's reality and the teacher's background is a task beyond most seasoned educators and an issue that many teachers approach with the same attitude as Jason and Julia.

<div align="center">The Teaching Assignment:</div>

<div align="center">The Curriculum Meets the Inner-City Student</div>

Meeting the expectations of any curricula is a demanding and difficult task, particularly for beginning teachers. Meeting the expectations with inner-city students, who are often working below grade level and without sufficient support from home, is an almost insurmountable quest for the beginner because of inexperience.

I'm supposed to do five strands of math, two strands of science, and all this language stuff. Part of it is my own fault because my planning isn't as strong as it should be. But it's hard, they've got all this stuff [at the workshops] and my kids don't pick it up really quick. (Js2J12)

At this point I just got them to do something and I was pretty happy about the whole thing. [My program's] not structured for the portfolio, I've probably got the same amount of stuff but it's not structured for that. It's structured for the success in the room, for the needs that are there because I'm going to give them success. (Js3J74)

Wanting to provide students with successful life and curricular experiences is a challenge for any teacher, but it is made particularly difficult when the prescribed topics, textbooks, and tests are beyond students' current intellectual capabilities. The material that best suited the needs of many of Julia's and Jason's students was several grade levels below, but simply bringing Grade 5 novels and textbooks into an intermediate class does not work because it insults students and makes them feel even less capable. As well, the expectations and content of the new curricula must be met, which leaves it up to inner-city teachers to create their own materials at an appropriate level and in a language that students understand.

> *I end up making my own tools and ways to organize it so I can see it in the context that I'm in. But it's really hard. I make a tool and it doesn't work so I have to make another tool and it doesn't work; it's pretty difficult. (Js2J21)*

Differing Professional Priorities

Initially, Jason defined his job in terms of providing appropriate community-building and life-skills experiences for students.

> *For my students, learning curriculum is secondary to being a responsible social citizen. An active member in a safe community who seeks out knowledge about self and the surrounding world. (JsJ4)*

In contrast, Julia saw it as her primary responsibility to cover the curriculum, and her challenges came in the form of how best to accomplish this task.

> For me, I have a big priority on curriculum, I really do. (Ju4J6)

> I'm alright with following it, I can get through the curriculum, but I'm challenged

with integrating it because I'm still struggling just to get by. I'm sure it will get

better as time goes on. (Ju3J28)

Although Julia maintained this vision of her role as an educator, she appreciated and

understood Jason's commitment to his social priorities.

I just wish that my kids would develop more of a respect for one another. Jason is

really hard nosed in that respect. He's pushing upstream, and successfully so, by

imposing that structure on them, treating one another in a fair way. (Ju3J49)

Interestingly, Jason began to admire Julia for her ability to teach "stuff." Without

swaying from his conviction that the curriculum was not to be the first priority, he began

to realize that his job extended past that of establishing a community and teaching life

skills. He admitted later in the year that, although the school board hired him to be who

he is, *"They also hired me to teach their [stuff]. So I have to respect that"* (Js2J31). To

this end, Jason began to lament the subject matter knowledge and curricular materials that

he did not have to offer students,

Every morning I'm scrambling for stuff. (Js3J53)

I look at Jeff and Julia and I think "Oh man, I wish I could be more like them."

They look like they're teaching stuff, they have stuff, I see the things that they're

doing. What am I doing? I don't have any stuff. (Js2J143)

John [vice-principal] comes into my room the other day, one of my kids had been

a jerk, so he gets sent down to the office. And John says "Do you have some work

for Tommy to do?" I flip out on him for just a split second. I say, "If grade 7 was

a book I would have bought one. Everybody would have one and I wouldn't need

to be here. We could just insert tape when R2D2 goes blup, blup, blup, turn the

page and let's go." He's looking at me, "Alright, relax, do you have anything to

give this kid or what?" "No, I don't. If I had anything I'd be using it." (Js3J104)

Administration, Assessment, and Organization

"I didn't have a chance, I didn't have time, I didn't know what I was doing" (Ju4J10).

Beyond the curriculum and the aspects that directly involved the students,

both teachers found the tracking (portfolios and reporting), the long range plans, and the

ability to sort, file, and keep on top of the paper storm an on-going battle.

Administrative Tasks and Planning

We have so much to work through, it's going to be a challenge because I'm

expected to hand in these long-term plans by mid-September, in the next few

weeks. And I still don't have a grasp of what my students are capable of, what's

going to make sense for them to do. (Ju1J43)

I looked at John [the vice-principal] and I'm not a teacher of 25 years where I

have a binder full of earth crust stuff. I'm doing this stuff on the board, I don't

even have a note. So in a lot of ways, I'm not very well planned but I don't have

enough energy to afford to have the note ahead of time. (Js2J28)

I respect the fact that I should have short-term plans but I also respect the fact

that I don't have a lot left to give after work's done. (Js2J30)

Creating an Organizational Schema

From individual units to a day book, Julia did not plan ahead or keep a record of what she had done until later in the year. These tasks required knowledge of organizational structures that Julia did not acquire or inquire about during her practica placements or time at the faculty.

> I didn't keep a daybook for the first third of the year. I started and then I'd forget. I didn't keep records on what I'd done because I was jumping all over the place. Keeping a day book is so easy now, I actually made plans on this blank sheet that I sit down and fill out the night before. (Ju4J13)

While Julia learned about daybooks from another teacher, Jason learned about different organizational tools from Julia.

> *Like Julia's idea, I keep on developing tools to help me get through and then I find that the tool's no good, organizational tools. I'm so disorganized, I am not a disorganized person. Mark my words.* (Js1J171)

And later in the year, the same theme arose,

> *It's not because I'm disorganized, I've never been disorganized. I've always done really well in school because I'm anal. But I didn't know how to be anal enough for this.* (Js3J10)

Assessment: Tracking, Marking, Portfolios, and Reporting

One of the most difficult tasks for both teachers was developing useful, easy to manage, informative, and sustainable evaluation practices. Julia originally erred on the side of abundance by marking, noting, and keeping everything each student was assigned. "I

overmarked, I collected too much first term, I collected every step along the way in every class. I felt it was important to collect every sheet" (Ju3J23). A system that also proved to be too much work was the task of creating a monthly matrix summary of all this material and sending it to the parents for their signature and comments. As this system did not spark parental response and proved difficult to sustain, she stopped this form of monthly reporting before the end of first term. Possibly due to this system and its revised counterparts, Julia found marking an overwhelming task and the first term report cards time-consuming and difficult to write. "That first term report cards I stressed out so much, I'm thinking "how am I going to evaluate this person?" I was going through his notebooks and I passed him on everything" (Ju3J21).

Using her Grade 6 teacher as a model, Julia began using weekly reflection papers and quizzes to give her an idea of students' progress. As she became more organized and able to understand and predict academically what students were capable of completing, she streamlined her methods for collecting and evaluating students' work by recording it all on a class list for each subject. This served her well in the eventual writing of the second and third term reports.

> It took me like half the time and I had no difficulties making comments. I marked things in advance as opposed to letting things pile up. I went to my science page. Looked across test 1, test 2, lab, work station. Bang, done. . . I'm finding it easier to write in report card language and I didn't have as many corrections to make. (Ju4J32-Ju4J33)

Jason did not have a similar growth experience when it came to assessment. The entire

issue plagued him for the majority of the year, as he initially ignored the inevitability of this task and then tried to create and re-create appropriate tools for marking and recording.

> *And that's the part where I'm scared, because I have a pile of marking. I need to look at this [assignment] and say, " Okay, they understood history, they could feel for the perspective of women." Now there's no spot for that on the report card but I'll find a spot. The next thing is I need to look at the writing and I don't know how to look at it in writing yet.* (Js1J141)

> *My kids don't know how they're doing a lot of the time because I don't get back to them and that's not good. They deserve to get that stuff back.* (Js2J23)

During each conversation the issue of assessment came up more than once, until finally it became a goal for next year. It is interesting to note that this is not the type of goal that Jason set for himself the previous September.

> *I don't really mark anything at all, and that's awful. I was telling my friend about that earlier, if I have to pick a couple of goals, one would be to get their stuff back to them and have it marked and let them know how they're doing. . . I'll do better next time.* (Js3J67)

Both teachers believed they could do better with portfolio development and management. Unaccustomed to the volume of material and the rubrics to be attached, Julia and Jason were intimidated by the level and content of the sample portfolios their school board was expecting them to create for each student.

I just don't have it together. We went to a workshop on Friday. They pass around these portfolios with the things glued on the one side. . . and these rubrics stapled to everything. For all I know I've got all that, it's all in a file with each kid's name on it. But I'll be damned if I know whether it's narrative or whatever. (Js3J73-Js3J74)

Not every piece in my portfolios has a little rubric on it. I've just stuffed pieces in and when it came down to doing my first report cards I hadn't done any rubrics for writing. (Ju4J10)

However, by the third term Julia devoted much time on the weekends to ensuring she had completed rubrics on her writing portfolios before it came time to write the report cards.

I had seven writing samples already assessed and I could just look through and wham. That made it easier. I really focused on that in third term, five of the seven pieces had a complete rubric with full paragraphs of comments. (Ju5J20)

Conversely, Jason was still experiencing assessment difficulties as he tried to write the report cards in a language and manner that he thought meaningful.

It wasn't "provincial" enough. Some of the stuff that I wrote, in hindsight maybe it was inappropriate, but other stuff was totally appropriate and beautiful. Mary [the principal] said, "You have to re-do this, we can't say that." (Js3J14)

They were really hard, I wound up having to take a personal day just because I was having an anxiety attack. (Js3J16)

Coping with the Situation

Aware of his own emotional needs, Jason would take the occasional personal day when he felt things were getting to be too much. He reasoned that he was in this for the long haul and wanted to insure he made it to June. Jason was also up front about asking friends and colleagues for help.

> *She loves coming into my room to do these boring grammar lessons. I don't even know what these things are, conjunctions and prepositions. That's how I use my Student Resource Teacher time and she loves coming into my room because the other class tears her apart.* (Js3J99)

Jason quietly traded planning time with another teacher providing her class with music while she taught parts of the history program. He also enlisted the help of friends: "*I continue to bring in anybody and everybody. Thank God I've got so many unemployed, talented, teacher friends*" (Js3J109).

Without these resources or the desire to call upon colleagues, Julia looked to her experiences as an intermediate student and to teacher resource books and courses for the answers to management, curriculum, and workload concerns. What also worked for Julia was her work ethic.

> It took me four days of solid work. When I got home I worked. And here I'm having 12- to 15-hour days to get things done. I think it will get easier. . . I'm wasting a lot more time than I need to because I'm not efficient enough yet. (Ju2J43)

Julia put many hours and a great deal of thought into creating and refining her recording,

planning, and marking procedures. This was done to present the most accurate picture of students and the most streamlined process for tracking what was needed for report cards. As well, she re-created, out of necessity, management techniques until she found a system that would allow her to teach while still upholding standards for the respect and dignity she thought students deserved. Julia also invested time and money in finding resources that would allow her to teach the curricula in an interesting and appropriate manner for her below-grade level students. This workload, the students, and the overall pace did not come without a price,

> I was sick over the [Christmas] holidays for quite a while and my first day back at school I only lasted through the morning. I think it was two-fold: one, because I was feeling terrible, I didn't have any energy, and I was really clued out. And two, they were awful on my first day and I was so scared and frustrated and disappointed to have to go back to all that, that I went home and took the rest of the first week off. (Ju3J11)

Early in the school year, the volume of work and the requirements of daily classroom life also caused Jason to realize that *"this place is a frigging marathon, I tell you, holy"* (Js1J198). This marathon became more difficult to run during the winter months: *"I'm all right in my head, I'm all right in my heart, I feel kind of sick, but nothing that's going to put me down. My kids are still functioning"* (Js2J130).

<u>Lessons Learned in Practice</u>

Without the relevant experience, teacher's perspective, and practical knowledge needed to envision the requirements of teaching, these teachers were initially under the

impression that they were adequately prepared to teach. It was not until they were confronted with the unrelenting reality of students and their inability to easily and effectively assume the role of classroom teacher that they began to seriously question the quality of their preservice programs. This practical reality quickly illustrated that the successful year both teachers experienced at their faculty of education had not prepared them, as they thought it had, to teach. At this time the previously invisible gap between preparation and practice was made visible through the unexpected responsibilities, unfamiliar procedures, and overwhelming obstacles that Julia and Jason encountered in the course of daily practice.

It was from this enlightened teacher's perspective that the range of skills and knowledge that they did not or could not acquire during their preservice years gained specific form as well as detailed description. From this understanding of what they perceived to be missing from preparation, both teachers deemed their programs to be inferior and incapable of providing answers to their teaching dilemmas. In contrast, Jason and Julia saw the practical skills and formats presented in the school board's workshops to be the saviour in this situation. They questioned why these sessions could provide what their university programs could not offer. They did not seem to realize the differences that come with the experiences of teaching.

It is interesting to consider the possibility that if their impressions of teaching had been challenged over the course of the preservice year, and if theory had been specifically and continually interpreted within practicum placements, would the gap have been evident sooner, eliminated, or prevented from taking root? Regardless of the outcome of

such thinking, the reality for Julia and Jason remains. Their initial images and expectations for themselves as teachers were not appropriate for their new classrooms. Once they had established that changes needed to be made, both teachers utilized the lessons, experiences, and insights gained in daily practice to re-shape and make more practical their image of self-as-teacher in light of the demands of students, parents, curricula, and the administrative aspects of teaching.

CHAPTER 6

TEACHING AND THE RECONCILIATION OF SELF-IMAGE

"Why can't I teach them anything, what am I doing wrong?

I thought I was a qualified teacher" (Ju3J12).

Julia's Image Is Revised

Julia realized in August that her first teaching assignment would be difficult, but she was under the impression that her preservice program had delivered as promised and that she had become a teacher. In some ways she was correct in this assumption. From the perspective of the unchallenged, student-created image of self as teacher, she was prepared to teach. She had the affective qualities required of "good" teachers and an awareness that discipline and class control would be a focal point in the coming year. Julia quickly discovered that this unchallenged perspective had no chance of survival against the realities of teaching.

I almost quit my job on Tuesday [first day of school]! I will remember that day for the rest of my life. It was so horrible that I almost threw up in class. I felt so overwhelmed, no one knew I was there. I couldn't get their attention, they were calling across the classroom. I was actually thinking, I don't want to be a teacher, I'll tell them at the end of the day that I can't do it. I will go and do something else, get a job in a park. I'll become an EA. I'll get out of this school board, they'll never know I was hired. (Ju1J57)

I was killing myself and going home crying every day. Why are these kids so mean to one another for one thing, and more importantly from my point of view as

a teacher, why can't I teach them anything? (Ju3J12)

As the year progressed, Julia tried to reconcile what she thought her job and her role in the classroom would be, with the reality of the real world of schools.

> I never really felt calm. I was always kind of on edge. I was trying to develop eyes in the back of my head too quickly. I was really stressed out a lot of the time, confused and frustrated about why things weren't going the way I wanted them to. And when kids weren't learning and weren't remembering and didn't want to sit and listen, I became very frustrated. I thought that it was my problem. As the teacher I just constantly felt like I had to run around to figure out who was hurting whom, who was stapling whose arm, and all that stuff. (Ju3J9)

The daily frustration and feelings of failure eventually caused Julia to re-examine her nurturing approach to teaching. The fun-and-friendly teacher she had envisioned herself to be was challenged to the point that Julia used the Christmas break, her first time of "real" reflection, to take stock of what had transpired from a perspective informed by her own experiences.

> I think I would have been kind of crazed regardless of where I was. Because the whole experience has been so incredibly overwhelming. But over the holidays I forced myself to have some good reflection time and think about what happened and where I was going, what worked and what didn't. My boyfriend and I came up with a plan. We revamped class rules and I have a new way of looking at things. If there's a student whom I really want to be in class and hand things in, I'm not going to stress myself out and kill myself over getting this kid to learn,

because if they're not and they're disturbing others, I'm going to remove that

problem, no question. (Ju3J11)

I don't know if saying I'm being more of a bitch is the right term. . . but I'm being

more hard nosed, not afraid of confrontation as much as I was. I am not a

confrontational person, that's my biggest challenge: sticking to my guns and

laying it on the line and *staying there*, not walking away. (Ju3J14-Ju3J15)

Julia spent the remainder of the year trying to define in her own terms, the "in your face"

style of teaching that she saw as so successful in Jason's class and that she heard about

from colleagues.

That's where Jason and I differ a lot. He really fights against the stream,

everything that he is right now is for teaching, that's all he talks about, that's all he

places his efforts into. Everything is to change these kids. He's been very

successful; he's really pushed and pushed to set up his philosophy. (Ju3J9)

Jason has done wonders with his class, because he's sensitive and he teaches them

this whole community, always focusing on that. And also having a really

dominant you-can't-step-out-of-line personality. The kids know where it's at, they

know what's expected. It's awesome, the kids are really great with him. (Ju4J4)

Jason's Perspective Widens

The persona he adopted served Jason well and was largely responsible for the success he

had in establishing the community and maintaining his role as "the bear." This is not to

suggest that this success came easily because of the firm approach; "*A friend of mine said*

"*Jesus, you're turning into a miserable teacher.*" *So I just went [pause] thanks [pause]*

that kind of hurt . And that was the truth. It's making me miserable" (Js1J73). It is also

not to suggest that Jason did not care about his students, their learning, and their future as

much as Julia did. He had a different way, beyond the "I can be your friend" way of

expressing this ethic of care.

> *I think about it sometimes, I've got a list of stuff that I'm not doing in my heart*
>
> *and that makes me feel shitty.* (Js2J23)
>
> *I just wish I could give them everything, you know?* (Js3J118)

Although insistent that the classroom was a respectful and safe place, I often observed

Jason quietly chatting with some of his more challenging students to offer words of

encouragement when they were deeply frustrated or upset, singing with the class at the

end of the day to put them in the right mood for home time, and doing everything possible

to make each student feel important and included in the community.

Just as Jason successfully created this community and his role in it, as stated in his

pre-school goals, he also worked towards the part of his image of self that wanted to

become a reflective practitioner. He continued to transfer critical, reflective thinking

habits to practice and brought these skills into the classroom when he thought it necessary

for students to be more acutely aware of what was going on. During one of my Thursday

cooking visits, as the students were packing up their silent reading materials and getting

ready to move to their projects, Jason stopped the class. We talked later about his

thinking at that moment, as he had begun to get a bad feeling about the safety factor in the

room.

I really like the fact that I can say. Maybe it's flaky I don't know, but I say, "I'm

feeling like this, and since I'm inevitably the one who's going to make the decision

here, then you need to be sensitive to that and I'd like to know how you're feeling

right now." When they look at you and say, "It's your problem buddy, it's not

ours." "Okay, we'll fire it up then, let's go." (Js2J175)

The projects went ahead without incident. This ability to stop and deal immediately with

potential problems, and to re-direct if needed, characterizes reflective ability at the in-

action end of the continuum. Although not often commensurate with the abilities of a

beginning teacher, Jason's well-established classroom community and its rules meant that

his management problems were at times minimized, and this afforded the opportunity to

step outside of the action for a moment or two to examine what was happening. Most

beginners do not have the time or confidence to make this type of thinking a reality.

For Jason, reflection is not just the technical stage of retelling, the "he said, we

said" exercise that is often passed off as something deeper. He critically examined

practice, with the moral and ethical issues raised by teaching in this environment often at

the core of his thoughts.

To be critically self reflective, and to try and develop or figure out what a critical

pedagogy is, is a very emotionally destructive thing. So I thought about it and I

know I was critically aware I'm making a decision tomorrow and it's the best

decision I can make. And I have to be okay with that. (Js3J32)

I really went through a hard bit. I always go through hard bits, that's just who I

am though. I'm just brutal, I think and I reflect and I take it apart and I build it all

back together. I find out all the things that are wrong with it. (Js3J179)

Finding out the things that were wrong with his program was useful, but without the body

of practical knowledge needed by classroom teachers, Jason was not always able to

change things as quickly or as efficiently as he would have liked. Despite these gaps in

his knowledge base, and despite the difficult teaching environment, Jason's commitment

to reflective practice remained strong throughout the year, even when the going got

rough. *I think my problem is, that I think too damn much, it makes my head hurt*

(Js2J166).

Reflective Practice Is Retained

Like the teachers in other studies (Etheridge, 1989; Kwo, 1996; Munby & Russell,

1989; Spafford, 1987), Jason demonstrated that beginners are capable of critical and in-

action reflective thought, and this practice served him well in the development of a

practical knowledge base. Also, like the teachers in other studies (Day, 1993; Etheridge,

1989; Goodman,1987; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Kane, 1991; Kwo, 1996; McDermott,

Gormley, Rothenberg, & Hammer, 1995; Spafford, 1987), Jason's reflective experience

was different from Julia's, and this difference reinforces the idea that for reflective

thought to take root, survive, and be productive, certain conditions must be present to

model and support the practice. As well, tangible alternative methods and materials must

be accessible through workshops or veteran teachers to solve the practical teaching

dilemmas that reflective practice identifies.

Jason's eventual amalgamation of self as environmental educator and self as

classroom teacher came about with the increase in his professional awareness of the job

demands and an inability to fulfill these requirements as completely as he thought he should or saw others doing. He was particularly concerned with organizational, assessment, and administrative tasks as well as the best way to teach subjects other than geography. The realization that he could not evaluate the usefulness of language exercises and math lessons with the knowledge and ability that he could the geography curriculum was a source of personal unrest as he tried to do the best for his students. As well, his on-going battle to keep up with marking and collecting "stuff" brought home the reality of teaching as opposed to earth-science facilitator. His self-image and personal goals also had to come to terms with not meeting the standards that he had set in August and with compromising some of his ideals in order to fulfill the requirements of his job.

> *I don't believe in a lot of the stuff I'm doing right now so I have to figure out if I can accept that.* (Js2J95)

> *She [workshop leader] says "This is a society that needs skills." I say "Skills, to what? Be productive economic members of the Ontario economy competitive in a global economy?" Some of us don't believe in that.* (Js3J212)

> *I've regressed, I've sold out in some ways, I haven't in others.* (Js3J116)

> *I'm finding myself saying stuff that I don't want to say and doing things that I wish I never would do, snapping at kids and yelling at them.* (Js3J86)

As Jason continued to reconcile his personal beliefs with the explicit requirements of classroom teaching, he began to shift his view of the job to include specific pacing tasks and an easier acceptance of "stuff." With our earliest fall conversations still in my mind, I never thought I would hear Jason refer so casually to the fact that he was photocopying

"stuff," let alone saving it for future use.

> *Although I photocopy 30 of everything, there's only 25 of them. I manage to have one left at the end of the day, I'm just putting it all away [for next year].* (Js3J50)
>
> *I'm learning how to sequence a bit better in my classroom too. This is really neat, I have some sort of seatwork for the quicker kids, so I can get them going. . . Then the other guys, my slow kids, the high needs kids and the behavioural, they stagger in and I get them going. Then I can actually go back and see how the good kids are doing as opposed to leaving them alone all the time.* (Js1J104-Js1J105)

This relatively "intuitive" element in teaching demonstrated the extent to which Jason had to learn the job from the ground up. Making such things more explicit through teacher thought/talk, as described by Ethell (1998), might have given Jason an opportunity to use this simple technique earlier in the year.

<div align="center">

Essential Elements of Self as Teacher

</div>

In the end, both teachers moved away from their initial unchallenged self-images, yet some aspects survived and continued to define their fundamental view of self as teacher.

> *They're screaming blue bloody murder on each other over this job activity, but I judge it cultural and say "Okay, nobody's getting hurt, just yet.". . . So I watch them and one kid says, "You know, you're point isn't any better when you yell that." I think, "Well good, I'm glad I sat here and watched that."* (Js1J82-Js1J83)

The whole thing on Thursdays is running so smoothly I barely know what to do

with myself. I say, "Linda, listen, go set that stuff up. Alex, you know what's

going on, you help out these guys. You're going to have to wait to work on your

paddle for a little bit because you're going to need to help somebody else."

(Js3J75)

Just as community and fostering a sense of self-determination and responsibility remain

at the heart of Jason's image of the job, Julia still defines her role in the affective domain,

but with an edge: "I didn't really know how to be harsh. I'm not a harsh person, but I've

become one." (Ju5J103). Her idea of harsh included and valued the facts that her

students trust her and that she has developed a relationship with them beyond that of

disciplinarian.

> They feel they can come to me and talk to me about anything and that's really
>
> important to me. (Ju3J41)
>
> I communicate a lot better with my kids than I used to. They'll listen, they'll stay
>
> for me after school, we talk like normal human beings. I've asked them to reflect,
>
> to tell me what's going on and what I can do and what they can do, to make this
>
> better. (Ju4J62)

Finally, affecting the images of self as beginners were the external impressions and

expectations of first-year teachers held by their employer.

Images of Teachers from the Outside

I have a newsflash for you, "If that's where it's at, that's not very good." When

the first thing that they say to you at the workshop is "Congratulations, you all

survived the first term," I know they're making light, but at the same time if

survival is the basic common denominator, why the hell am I doing this? (Js2J52)

The survival mentality surrounding the first year of teaching is still a pervasive and

deeply held belief. Jason railed against this more so than Julia, but the question remains:

if we understand that the first year will be a time of disillusionment, failure. and the

shattering of idealism (Montgomery Halford, 1998), why do we accept this notion instead

of doing more to prevent it or to assist the beginner?

In an effort to address this issue, their school board acknowledged that beginning

teachers would need support in the form of workshops. These events offered valuable

information and insight into the "how"of teaching yet they often held up a picture of ideal

teacher that Jason and Julia found intimidating and impossible to replicate.

I have no problem telling my employer that I leave this experience [the

workshops] completely overwhelmed and in evaluating myself as a teacher I come

up short every time I leave. (Js1J58)

They tell us, "Don't beat yourself up about this. You will not be able to do this,

but this is what you have to do. ". . . Its like, thanks for being sensitive to the fact

that I'm going to fail, theoretically. But either way it takes a day or two after you

leave there until you don't feel like you're useless. Because there's all this stuff

and for all intents and purposes it is stuff that my kids deserve, that they should

know how to do. I might not always like the way it's framed, but theoretically I'd

like my kids to have all this knowledge. (Js2J16)

I went to this workshop a couple of weeks ago and they made me feel like such an

inferior bozo. They brought in all these portfolios reading, writing, and math and they were all with level four students and all just fabulously organized . . . They made a point of saying, "Just to let you know these are all from second-year teachers," meaning, that if you don't have it together now, by next year that's it, you're not going to be able to do it. . . I couldn't help but feel awful, I was almost in tears looking through these portfolios and feeling totally unsuccessful. (Ju4J7-Ju4J9)

Although the workshops provided valuable information, this effort should be seen as only the first step in assisting the beginner. The literature also emphasizes the importance of providing new teachers with an experienced peer teacher or mentor to assist in the day-to-day details and questions surrounding implementation and evaluation of potentially unfamiliar programs, strategies, and structures. Such a personal sounding board can help prevent the beginner from being left to re-invent the wheel or spend too much time with issues that experience could help streamline. Establishing such relationships has proven to increase the beginner's ability not just to survive but also to succeed and flourish in the first year as well as to develop and maintain reflective practices (Eraut, 1995; Goodman, 1987; Montgomery Halford, 1998; van Manen, 1995) .

Just as the workshops overlooked the value of establishing such professional partnerships, they also presented a negative and dismissive attitude towards reflection.

[The workshops] don't have emphasis on improving your teaching based on looking back. She introduced it by saying, "Well, we have half a day left with you and I know it's a topic that a lot of you hate, and I've got to tell you I hate this but

it's on evaluation, self-evaluation [pause] and I've got to tell you I hate self-

evaluation." (Ju4J101)

Julia voiced her anger towards this attitude, particularly because she felt her preservice

courses had not assisted in establishing reflective practices, and she was hoping for more

guidance than received from these sessions. Instead of leaving this topic to the end, Julia

suggested it would have been a valuable opening day subject, especially if accompanied

by a journal (to remind her to write). Even though this workshop facilitator's attitude

towards reflection and self-evaluation is not to be applauded, it remains a point for

speculation whether merely receiving a journal could have sparked reflective practice in

Julia's first year. Her reaction to the sharing time for teachers at the end of each session

did not indicate that she saw the value in collaborative reflection nor in similar group

experiences at the faculty. As the literature reveals, such interactions with peers and

veteran teachers are essential if the novice is to move beyond the self and survival stage

of teaching and establish and maintain reflective practice.

The school board also perpetuated a similarly antiquated view of teaching that

assumes that any teacher can teach in any situation. This practice of placing new teachers

in difficult schools, out of their certified teaching divisions, runs contrary to the body of

literature on expert teachers.

Of course, if the craft knowledge of teaching is devalued, then it doesn't matter.

Novices can be expected to do as well as ten-year veterans. All that is needed to

succeed as a teacher is enthusiasm and motivation! (Berliner, 1994, p. 36)

Julia's and Jason's placements were based on the assumption that teaching is a

transferrable task. "Pedagogical knowledge is contextualized, it is not easily generalized" (Berliner, 1994, p. 13). Thus the expert's apparently seamless command of a suburban Grade 8 class cannot be simply and successfully effected with inner-city first graders. Placing both teachers in a difficult school out of the limited area of their experiences ensured that what they might have been able to use from their preservice preparation was out of reach.

Next Year: Revised Self Image Plans Ahead

"And then I think, I've got to do it all again next year" (Js3J193).

"I feel a lot more positive about next year than I have felt about this year" (Ju4J116).

Jason and Julia now have a different image of self as teacher and a different vision of what the job requires. These new perspectives were created out of experience and the knowledge they have worked hard to understand and make their own. The extent to which they developed a clearer perception of the reality of teaching was evident in the difference between last summer's plans and expectations for the fall and the preparations they were making in the spring for the coming year. Although both teachers felt they could not do much to change the course of events for the final term of the current year, they were brimming with thoughts for September.

> I actually have a list started. Whenever I'm thinking about what I'm going to do next year, what I need to organize over the summer. (Ju4J27)

> As boring as it might seem, if you don't crack down on them the first week and set the tone and the rules, and follow them, it's going to screw your whole year. That's what it did for me, I wasn't as hard as I should have been. (Ju5J103)

Julia now has the experiential understanding needed to find meaning in the advice that she was given the previous summer. Her first-year fun-and-friendly format was proven, overwhelmingly, to be the wrong approach. Now she echoes the words of her colleagues as she prepares for her second year. Jason experienced a similar shift in focus as his experiences brought the realizations that "stuff" does play a major role in the daily life of a classroom teacher and that the necessary evil of sound assessment strategies and practices must be tolerated.

> *I'm designing next year's [long-range plans] in my head you know.* (Js3J49)
>
> *I've got all of this these things floating around in the back of my head that I don't even really need to write down or else I would-- tools and structures and stuff that I would like to put in place next year. But that will be easier for me knowing how to create a learning space.* (Js3J93)

The Continuum of Teacher Development Revisited

These shifts in thought and focus indicate the extent to which both teachers are now able to think and act with informed intent. This year-long journey has seen Julia and Jason travel back and forth among the novice, advanced beginner, and competent teacher categories and from technical to in-action reflective practitioners. Jason, although at times a competent and critically reflective educator, was back at the technical-rational level of thought and the novice level of action as he encountered and made personal sense of new teacher tasks. His experiences indicate the extent to which the development of practical knowledge can be non-linear in its progression. Jason's competence as a community builder allowed him the automaticity to reflect and act at the in-action and

critical levels. However, his inexperience with language programs and assessment practices returned him to the novice-technical levels as he attempted to select and create appropriate lessons and procedures.

Julia's progress as reflective practitioner was more linear as she was strictly in survival mode at Christmas, trying to analyze what had gone wrong and trying to find a way to ameliorate the situation. As the year progressed, she could evaluate these practices as well as her evolving tracking and assessment systems, and from her growing knowledge base could select from alternatives the best possible next step. However, when confronted with a new situation she would return to the technical level to try and cope with the unfamiliar dilemma or demand. This movement was accompanied by a similar working through the novice stage and into the advanced beginner stage for these same immediate aspects of teaching, but a lack of experience and knowledge ensured that other areas of Julia's practice remained at the novice level.

<div align="center">Summarizing Thoughts</div>

As the year progressed and Julia and Jason worked back and forth between levels of understanding and competence, their vision of the task of teaching broadened and deepened through personal experience. From this perspective, both teachers began providing a wide range of comments about the quality and content of their faculty's programs. From the priorities and issues they highlighted it became clear the extent to which the beginner's ability to see what is happening and what needs to happen in a classroom depends upon a shift in thinking from the student's to the teacher's perspective. As these teachers faced the demands and the decisions required by every

level of teaching, they realized that their initial view of teaching (and self) was only the tip of the cognitive iceberg underlying practice. It was not until this shift in perspective occurred that they were able to see and voice in detail the specific areas and aspects of teaching for which they felt unprepared. What was undefined and unreachable in September was becoming unearthed and used to create a personal body of practical knowledge grounded in authentic, explicit experience that will continue to inform and guide their ability to teach with intent next year.

In an ideal world, these insights and challenges to their observation-based understanding of the task of teaching would have been made explicit during the preservice year. Without this shift in perspective, field placements become a forum for modeling the observable behaviours of associate teachers (Ethell & McMeniman, 2000), and the faculty becomes a place that must be endured until the real stuff of teaching comes back around. With a few exceptions, this was the perception that Julia has retained of her preservice year. This is certainly not to suggest that nothing of value occurred during that time; rather, what Julia did find helpful and meaningful fit with her pre-existing impression of what teaching entailed and not with the deeper cognitive and experiential reality of the job. From this perspective, both teachers could not make the deeper connections between the theory of the faculty and their practica experiences.

Julia's and Jason's comments about what they felt was missed in their preservice years, as well as the nature and scope of these ideas, reveal where preparation did not or could not communicate and connect theory to practice in meaningful ways. These suggestions and their thoughts for an "ideal" program depict the extent to which both

teachers moved away from a surface, idealized impression of the requirements of daily

classroom teaching.

CHAPTER 7

PRESERVICE PREPARATION:

TELLING, TEACHING, AND TRANSMISSION PROBLEMS

Perceptions of Quality of Preparation

Julia and Jason, whose perceptions as first-year teachers are documented in this

study, both reported that their preservice programs did not prepare them well for the

realities of teaching. While this study cannot indicate the extent to which their

perceptions are shared by others, it does highlight an important issue: Can and should the

gap between preservice preparation and the first year of teaching be addressed more

adequately in a preservice program?

As the school year began to unfold, and as the reality and diversity of the demands

of daily teaching ensued, Jason and Julia quickly and clearly concluded that their B.Ed.

classes and extended practicum experiences did not translate into successful teaching

practices. Jason's early thoughts convey his frustration with his preparation.

> *I'd have to hope that preparation for most aspects of teaching is remotely*
>
> *possible, at least mentionable or discussable. This makes me think that some*
>
> *people are just not sharing or haven't taken the time to think about it. (JsJ14)*
>
> *Many classes I attended had the same title as a course I now have to teach and yet*
>
> *the hours spent sitting there presently seem unrelated completely. How did they*
>
> *say so much, stimulate nothing, and manage to build little but frustration? (JsJ13)*

These broad statements soon gave way to detailed descriptions of what the school board's

workshops were providing that both teachers felt they should have received the previous

year. It was not until they had begun to experience the job personally and fully that they

could articulate these needs and see the gaps in their repertoire of teaching skills and

strategies.

Skills and Procedures for Planning and Assessment

> *We didn't do assessment strategies. What these kids, kids (?) these people*
>
> *[teacher candidates] should be doing is the stuff that we're doing in our*
>
> *workshops. Right after I leave I should head over to [the university] and say,*
>
> *"All right, here's three papers of a grade seven kid, level them."* (Js1J4)
>
> They didn't teach us at [the university] how to assess or track a student. Never
>
> once did I have to track a student. I had to assess a student's writing level based
>
> on some writing samples but that's as much tracking as I did. (Ju2J14)
>
> It would have been great to have a sheet that I could have at the front of my binder
>
> saying here are quick ways to assess your student's development every day.
>
> (Ju2J48)

Julia's perceptions echoed Jason's sentiments; she then expanded on the skills that she

needed in basic planning and organizational procedures. These first-year experiences

typify Berliner's (1994) idea that although a good deal of learning to teach is cognitive,

some of it is skill-like in nature. As Julia and Jason learned, when these skill-like parts

are not explored and routinized during preservice education, the confidence and the

efficiency of the novice teacher can be adversely affected (Berliner, 1994, p. 17).

> I don't think we did enough on portfolio development. I went to a workshop right
>
> before school [started]. A huge section was on portfolios, language portfolios,

and how to assess. They gave us five documents, this is all you need. It was fantastic, totally useable. . . I feel confident that I now know what I need, and [my students] already have a language portfolio with four things in it from the first week. They tell you exactly what you need, baseline writing, get it done in your first week. And after that, here's the stuff you need to do. We didn't get anything like that at [the university] and it's really important. (Jul J31-Jul J32)

Even though it took Julia until the third term to be organized enough to make portfolios work, she was still thankful that this was one structure she did not have to create or search out on her own, unlike the format for creating a year's plan. "They don't show you how to make a long-range plan, they don't even tell you what a long-range plan is" (Ju4J122). As both teachers were expected to hand in their long range plans during September, they found this unfamiliar task time consuming and difficult. As well, Julia and Jason saw the need for a model to demonstrate how to break down these overall goals and expectations into workable, organized, teachable units and daily expectations. Julia's first exposure to a daybook in the second term brought to light the basics of what she was missing in the way of organizational tools.

I would have a sheet of lined paper and I'd just write in the times, but not all the time. I didn't think of it, no one ever said keep a daybook. I don't remember seeing one ever, until I saw Jeff's and it was "hey, look!" (Ju4J14)

Julia's insights, gained in practice, moved beyond daybooks to the foreign territory of formal reporting and the paperwork parade. She attributed her first term difficulty in writing report cards and getting bogged down in the bits and pieces of over-tracking to a

lack of exposure to, let alone experience with, assessment and administrative forms and formats.

> Nobody told me about any of this. They didn't challenge me to learn how to do report cards. They didn't challenge me with administrative things. No one told me what administrative stuff was all about. (Ju4J118)

Julia raises an important point, but the chances are that, even if she had been *told* about any of these things, she might not have been able to assimilate the information for later use. The underlying issue is that the need for such systems was not apparent to either teacher until he or she was confronted with these challenges in practice. It would be difficult to believe that neither teacher was exposed to assessment strategies and administrative tasks during practica placements or during the preservice year. What is more plausible is that they did not have the experience, opportunity, or guidance needed to connect these teaching tools to their unchallenged impressions of the task of teaching.

Social Links

Beyond these planning and assessment issues, Julia also felt she lacked the ability to jump some of the classic teacher hurdles. Although teaching is a potentially isolating profession by nature, Julia thought that her program should have given her tools or perspectives to develop collegial relationships. "They don't tell you how to mentor other teachers. They don't tell you how to establish bonds with other teachers and the *importance* of making those connections." (Ju4J122) These connections are one of the preconditions for developing as a reflective practitioner. As well, without this support and opportunity to freely ask questions, teachers like Julia, who are somewhat caught up

in the paradox of not knowing (Corcoran, 1981), end up making the same, unnecessary

mistakes as their silent predecessors. Oddly enough, Jason expressed a similar sentiment

"[The university] doesn't help people feel empowered in their relationships with others"

(Js2J148).

A Focus on Accumulating Resources

Julia in particular noted that the bulk of their preservice program had been about

the collecting of resources. However, because she was working out of her teaching

context, the majority of these resources did not prove to be useful in this first year.

Math blew me away. I have five years of great ideas, which I can't use right now

because they're all community exercises and the class isn't ready for that yet.

(Ju1J24)

It was all brainstorming exercises, or here's some neat drama activities, here's

some neat poetry activities. Those are good things to have, but they could devote

one or two weeks to that and have the rest of it *how* do you teach. (Ju3J25)

Julia expanded on this idea. Even though this conversation takes place at the end of the

first week of school, she already identified many issues surrounding the quality of

preservice preparation.

They didn't teach us how to be teachers. They give you resources but there's

nothing about metacognitive development, nothing about reflecting on your own

teaching . . . [They] hand out a bunch of science experiments that you can go to

Play and Learn and buy for $12. I mean, that's really important too, I'm not

downplaying that at all. I think it should be an even split though. I wish I'd

learned more about how to prepare myself mentally, how to prepare for the fact

that students are going to tell you to "F" off. (Jul J21)

Later in the year, any positive aspects of her preservice program that were even vaguely

evident in September had disappeared: "If [the university] continues that

program, it's going to become two years. It's going to be the super flake Lego program"

(Ju4J127). Jason was of a similar mind: *"Well, we don't know what we're doing. When I*

think about it, how the hell could we?" (Js1J64) As we talked around this issue, it

became clear that the missing link between preparation and practice was, in these

teachers' experiences, a variety of missed connections and profound miscommunication.

Failure to Communicate

Communication gaps came to light in the difference between what the faculty

thought it was delivering and the actual messages received. These beginning teachers

were not ready or able to decode the program and use it as their teachers intended. *"A lot*

of stuff happened at [the university] that I probably didn't pay attention to because it

didn't make any sense to me" (Js1J69).

PROF 190 Did Not Deliver

Nowhere is this inability to connect with candidates more evident than in the

discrepancy between the objectives of the PROF 190 course "Theory and Professional

Practice" and the teachers' experiences in this course. The course description states:

"This course begins the process of constructing and documenting professional knowledge

acquired through experience." Many of the components that Jason and Julia found

lacking in their preparation were the explicit focus of PROF 190, yet the teachers did not

remember it or think it served any useful purpose. Although instructors thought they were dealing with school cultures and practices, effective teaching strategies, lesson and curriculum planning, classroom management practices, a teacher's professional role, and action research, the reality was that little of this was meaningful for these two teacher candidates.

> The PROF 190 course, which was this basic get-together-and-talk-about-teaching, pardon me, but it was the biggest waste of my time. I didn't get anything out of that course. . . We talked about our practicum placements and got together in different groups to discuss issues we had, but it didn't turn out that way. . . they were very forgettable classes, I can't even remember what we did. (JulJ25-JulJ27)

> *I had to think about how I'm going to see myself in this role, that's why I didn't get into it. That's the whole PROF 190, the whole time I was going, okay, can you please tell me how the hell do I do this? How do I become this person, because this is a facade. Where am I going to act, at home or here? Can't be in both, they're two different cultures, two different planets.* (Js1J55)

This discrepancy between messages sent and messages received was neatly summarized by Jason's statement: *"As a student teacher you don't even know how to see the information that's going up on the overhead"* (Js1J66).

> Most beginning candidates seem firmly rooted in the observable and imitative stage of "teaching." Modeling reflective practice, engaging in teacher talk, and handing out resources are many steps ahead of what most candidates are capable of internalizing

from a teacher's viewpoint. For those of us who have been teaching for a decade (or more) it is difficult to recall what it really feels like not to have teaching experiences and, more importantly, not to think, interpret information, and make decisions as a teacher. It is difficult to return to that time when the routines and priorities for starting up the school year or the ability to read a class or re-invent a language program were not part of our cognitive structures and professional skills. It is equally difficult to remember when report card language represented a foreign tongue or when constructing a workable timetable was an overwhelming task. Teacher candidates are often cocky students (I know I was), not the confident beginning teachers that they think they are or try to appear to be. As such they occupy the same classrooms and schools as teacher educators and experienced teachers, often using the same words, but lacking the perspective, pedagogical knowledge, and practical experiences to speak the same language.

Connections and Consistency

It is important to note that within the same faculty the differences among candidates meant that Julia and Jason did not always receive the same messages from the courses they shared and the contacts they made.

Well, they do show you rubric stuff all the time. (Js1J66)

[There was] no training on how to write rubrics, they handed us a couple, kind of, but didn't talk about the importance. (Ju4J119)

I think to myself has [the university] ever taught us to do lesson plans ? I don't know, they might have given me a handout or something but I sure as hell didn't read it. (Js2J131)

I felt there was a lot of busy work at [the university]. You can only write so many

lesson plans . . . especially when I didn't find the lesson plans, the ones that they

expected to be handed in, useful. (JulJ41-JulJ42)

Furthermore, although the university is often full of messages about the importance of

integration of subjects, this program did the opposite with its own courses and faculty.

[The university] really chopped things up. Every course was different with no

connections between them. (JulJ42)

There's no consistency between what the teachers provide, so some teachers might

provide really good resources and others don't. I think I was lucky to have some

very good teachers. Like having J. M. for math was fabulous. But other teachers

are not as fabulous. (Ju4J126)

This failure of faculty/teacher candidate communication extended beyond the walls of the

university to the associate teachers in Julia's practica placements.

Connecting University Classroom to School Classroom

As the literature and Julia's classroom experiences suggest, merely being in the

vicinity of schools and students is not enough to develop one's own body of practical

knowledge. Exposure does not constitute experience, either in the faculty or in the field.

Here the inability of the faculty to communicate in a meaningful, specific, and practical

manner with associate teachers meant Julia's practicum was not a rich teacher-building

experience.

In my practicum I taught two full days. That's it. Because the associate teachers

aren't made aware of what is expected. The associate teachers aren't told to be

critical. The associate teachers aren't given an outline: Ask your students these

questions. Ask them to submit a reflection every week. Make them hand in their

lesson plans. Make them show you their assessment. That places a little more

responsibility on the associate teacher, but not necessarily. If [the university] has

it planned well enough, they can provide each associate teacher with a document. .

. . So when it comes back to time at [the university] they're going to say, "Do you

remember that one evaluation we had to do, what about that? What did you think

of that?" They'll have something to talk about rather than, the first week you get

back you're supposed to get together with your groups and talk about your

experiences. It's just so cheesy. (Ju4J124-Ju4J125)

Julia's preservice experiences were not unique. "Practicum experiences result typically in

student teachers being left to intuit the pedagogical principles underlying effective

classroom practice" (Ethell & McMeniman, 2000, p. 87). This reality suggests the need

for a type of communication different from the current model. This shift in perception

requires that teacher educators interact with each other, candidates, and associate teachers

in a Venn diagram manner, with the teacher candidates as the overlapping centre, as

opposed to the satellite method that Jason and Julia experienced. Satellites travel around

each other, transmitting messages but leaving it to the recipient to decode and make

meaning. In contrast, the elliptical, interconnected Venn diagram provides the possibility

for back-and-forth shared communication in the attempt to create mutual meanings and

mutual goals.

Giving Voice to the Tacit

The core objective of this type of communication would be to assist beginners in building the foundation for their practical knowledge base, with the realization that the shift from a student's to a teacher's perspective is not a switch that can be thrown the minute they walk into the faculty or their first school placement. In order to build a channel for dialogue in which the message sent is the message received, teacher thought and not just teacher talk must feature prominently. Ethell and McMeniman's (2000) attempt to establish such a decoding of the tacit to help develop these links for beginners did successfully "get inside a teacher's head [to] get a glimpse of all the things he thought about which influenced what we were seeing as his teaching (Louise)" (Ethell & McMeniman, p. 93; see also Ethell, 1998). These teacher candidates had the opportunity to watch a video of an expert teacher teaching and then a second video in which the teacher watched himself, explaining what he was thinking and the decisions that went into selecting this lesson and its materials. In this way beginners could begin to see explicitly how the "what" of teaching is informed by the "why" and "how."

Such explicit explanations must lay the groundwork if candidates are to link theory with the reality of classrooms. Furthermore, if associate teachers are to participate in this process, a corresponding and supporting link between the faculty and the schools must also be established. Although a perfect match is improbable, it would be helpful if universities attempted to provide teachers with a summary of the expectations for candidates in courses such as PROF 190. In my experiences as an associate teacher, few candidates arrive with an understanding of what they should be focusing on or the

questions they should be asking to support coursework. Working from this lack of specific information, I have always assumed that modeling appropriate practice, offering resources, and providing opportunities to teach were the conditions under which a teacher candidate would learn as much as possible in a practicum placement. Working with Jason and Julia has altered that view. With more direction from the faculty and with the idea that implicit aspects of teaching must be made explicit, I now realize the associate teacher's potential to assist candidates in connecting the ideas, issues, and theory of their courses to classrooms.

To achieve and maintain this connection, the "how" and the "why" of professional thought processes, while teaching and while preparing to teach, would be addressed explicitly and repeatedly. These decisions would then be explicitly linked to demonstrate how they determine the "what" of teaching. What specific thoughts, choices, and criteria are involved in making curricular, structural, and behavioural decisions? Why was this math assignment or activity selected? What are the considerations in making a timetable? How do desk arrangements figure into management structures, and why have a back-up plan?

Ideally, once lines of communication have been established among faculty, candidates, and schools, beginners could have the opportunity to personally connect theory to practica in significant and meaningful ways. Candidates might then begin their teaching with more positive perceptions than Jason and Julia retained from their preservice program.

Negative perceptions were further entrenched when Julia and Jason compared

time spent at the faculty with the tools and strategies they were collecting from workshops. It is useful to view the workshops provided by their school board as events that helped Jason and Julia to link their earliest teaching experiences with their growing understanding of teaching. With their greater experiential awareness, Julia and Jason were more able to envision an ideal preparation program. Their suggestions grew out of the frustrations they felt as they wondered why their preparation could not have been more like the school board's sessions. As such, their ideas are of interest to this study as they further illuminate, from within the first-year perspective, where preservice programs fall short in their ability to connect candidates to the real world of teaching.

Moving Beyond the Super Flake Lego Program

That's the whole philosophy behind teachers' college. It's this whole fairy tale view of the way things are. No one *ever* was honest. I think the people who were there just hadn't taught recently enough or they hadn't taught at schools that actually laid it on the line. You're going to become cynical, and there are going to be kids that you can't reach. No one ever said that. (Ju3J12)

Jason and Julia suggested a range of real-world applications and opportunities that they thought teacher candidates should be exposed to and required to meet in a quality preservice program. Going beyond the collecting of resources and "cheesy" group discussions, their suggestions were based on what they thought was needed to develop a more realistic view of what it takes to be the person responsible for a class for an entire school year. It is interesting to note that as the year progressed and their experiences expanded their understanding of the role of classroom teacher, some of these suggestions

and recommendations somewhat contradicted earlier thoughts.

> [Here's] 30 papers , you need to go home and mark those tonight. I want you to
>
> write a rubric, I want you to level them, and I want you to bring them back
>
> tomorrow. And if you don't, you didn't do your job, and that reflects badly upon
>
> you. They need to challenge the people in their program, to give them any idea of
>
> what it's about. (Ju4J119)
>
> You need to write a test and plan a day. And you need to plan a history lesson on
>
> the economics of Canada, and we don't have a textbook. (Ju4J121)

Jason expanded on these smaller planning issues to include the whole year.

> *They should say: Take a calendar of the school year, break it up into terms like*
>
> *you would, and factor in the 10% lost to assemblies, snow days, whatever for*
>
> *each subject. And let's see you logistically, just on paper with a spreadsheet, put*
>
> *it all in. . . So, the reality is that I have 8 science classes, 40 minutes each, let's*
>
> *say for two weeks. And I have that many classes theoretically to meet 35*
>
> *expectations.* (Js2J131- Js2J132)
>
> The focus should be more on long-term planning. Here's a challenge, here's the
>
> Grade 8 curriculum, how are you going to organize your history and geography
>
> units? What are you going to do first? And in September, when your school
>
> expects you to hand in your plans, how are you going to do it? That's a really
>
> important skill to be able to look at your year in its entirety and think of where you
>
> are going and how can you put things together to make sense. (Ju1J42)
>
> Then what there needs to be is a curriculum class--focus on the main objectives,

pick three things that you think are the main things that [your students] need to learn. (Ju5J107)

Ego, Self, and Students

Julia felt strongly that her program should have provided more realistic impressions about the damage to ego and self-image that beginning teachers often endure.

> They need to stick you in front of the classroom and say, "We're going to do some role playing." And then lay the shit onto that teacher, see how the teacher's going to deal with that. Because you're going to be on the spot, so if you can't deal with it in front of a bunch of training teachers, you don't have what it takes. (Ju4J119) You're going to be the one on the bottom. The one who's completely walked over. The one who's almost running out of the classroom crying because you can't take it. That's happened to me so many times this year. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. (Ju4J121)

Although Jason also focused on the need for role playing to add reality to the preservice program, his ideas centred on the specific types of learners who have the ability to de-rail your day.

> *All right, give [teacher candidates] this. This one's a hurricane kid he'll work through anything. This kid, unless he's engaged, unless he has something to do, will stand up and leave. . . You should have one kid with his hand tied behind his back who can only take notes with the wrong hand. Put a stopwatch around [someone's] neck and when the buzzer goes they're standing up and messing around with something. Have other kids who basically can't read, and they have*

to draw a picture. These are the realities of my room. (Js2J138-Js2J139)

Summarizing the Preservice Experience

Returning to the study's central question stated on page 1, the following

conclusions can be drawn. As noted earlier, these conclusions are based on the

experiences and perspectives of Julia and Jason, and as such they are not meant to speak

for all graduates of their faculty of education. Both teachers viewed their preservice

preparation as appropriate prior to the beginning of the school year, but those perceptions

began to change dramatically from the very first day with their own classes. Although the

gap between their K-6 preparation and grade 7 and 8 teaching accentuates their sense of

inadequate preparation, it cannot totally explain the shock they experienced or the basic

skills that they realized were missing.

As first-year teaching experiences were gained, Jason and Julia became

increasingly aware of their programs' inability to convey the "how" and the "why" of

teaching. As specific deficiencies in their practical knowledge base came to light, they

became more able to articulate what a preservice program should encompass. Effective

teacher education is not telling about complex things and expecting the novice to

understand and implement these ideas and theories. Hearing about guided reading or the

Tribes program is a long way from knowing the steps needed to create a unit or year's

plan encompassing these programs' goals and having the ability to evaluate their initial

usefulness or final success.

The salient issues that surfaced in Jason and Julia's words and thoughts highlight

the need for qualitatively different and more elaborate linking among faculty, associate

teachers, and teacher candidates. Enhanced interactions could facilitate more effective and appropriate communication with a view to enhancing the beginner's practical knowledge base. Within this process, a corresponding image of self as teacher, grounded in practice rather than in observation (as students and teacher candidates), might be tested and developed. Julia and Jason did not experience such a program, and they experienced major gaps between preparation and practice that resulted in negative perceptions of their preservice years. Judging from the extent of this "first-year phenomenon" in the literature, we can surmise that they are not alone (Kagan, 1992; Kane, 1991; Ryan 1970).

Professionalism: Responsibilities and Expectations

Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it. (Milne, 1926, p.3)

Is it possible for education to stop bumping down the stairs and approach the preservice preparation and first year socialization of teachers differently? As teacher educators and teachers, can we bridge the gap between faculty and classroom and not expect teacher candidates to walk between both worlds, suspended in mid-air? Can faculties of education and schools move beyond the theory/practice dichotomy to develop shared understanding and appreciation of the purposes and practices in each setting? From the literature and from the perceptions and experiences of Julia and Jason, it appears that a blending of these institutions is possible in several areas of preservice preparation.

Ethell and McMeniman's (2000) work demonstrates that teachers are able to

verbalize their thoughts about teaching and that access to these perceptions assists

beginners in moving beyond an initial, idealized image of self as teacher. Julia's practica

experiences illustrate the extent to which an unchallenged image can prevent candidates

from moving to a deeper level of professional understanding, as classroom exposure is

not the same as teaching experience. From this understanding, it would seem reasonable

that information from the faculty to associate teachers could indicate the importance of

having such detailed discussions with candidates, in order to make explicit what many of

us take as the "givens" of the job. From my personal perspective, it appears that courses

like Theory and Professional Issues could begin to build the bridge that communicates

these ideas to teachers, while also providing a forum for candidates to explore teacher

thought in order to bring deeper meaning to teacher talk.

Even though Ethell and McMeniman's (2000) study focused on the thoughts of

an "expert" teacher, in my experience, competent and proficient teachers are equally

capable of exploring their professional thought processes. A few years ago I conducted

an action research project concerning inner-city students and personal responsibility. I

asked the three teachers of Grades 4 to 6 at my school to share their ideas on the subject.

From this simple request I received original and practical activities and classroom

structures; moreover, two of the teachers explained the "why" behind their choices. From

these encounters and further conversations with colleagues, I think many teachers are able

to give voice to the supposedly "tacit" aspects of their daily practice. Tapping into this

resource seems a crucial step if candidates are to move beyond the tip of the iceberg of

professional thought, before they meet their "own" first class.

This journey into the minds of teachers could be used to assist beginners in comparing their understanding of the role of teacher to the depth and range of decisions and interactions required by even a portion of a teacher's day. The experiences of Julia, Jason, and the teachers in other studies (Ethell, 1999; Ethell and Meniman, 2000) indicate that until this issue becomes explicit and personal most beginners cannot see past their observational images. From this vantage point, theoretical lessons are often misunderstood or ignored, and the cycle that helps create practical knowledge cannot begin. Just as this study demonstrates to me the interconnection of experience, knowledge, and reflection in the professional growth of teachers, the issue of an idealized image of teaching appears to be the stone that must first be rolled away before this cycle can begin in the beginner's thoughts and practice.

Jason, the critically reflective, successful environmental educator, admitted that he could not always say for sure what he was presented with during his preservice year, but he did know that some of it did not make any sense at that time. Julia could not translate even basic structural or organizational skills from a four-month practicum placement into successful personal practice. Not until they experienced personally and directly the realities of teaching were their initial impressions truly challenged and found to be unequal to the task. At that early point in the year, the distinction between the real world of teaching and the fairy tale of the faculty took root, particularly in Julia's impressions and recollections of her preservice program. From this experiential perspective, the workshops could provide what their preparation could not, and beyond this point neither teacher looked to their preservice year for assistance with daily practice.

Teacher candidates seem unable to fully benefit from or connect the theoretical

aspects of teaching to personal practice without a deeper, fuller understanding of the

requirements of the job. In most other professions, that statement would almost seem

foolish. Who could perform in a professional capacity without understanding what is

required? However, the unique nature of schools as a professional arena provides us

with many years observing skilled practitioners at work, permitting the construction and

perpetuation of the myth that "anyone can teach." Knowing teachers is not the same as

knowing how to teach. Until we can communicate and act on that reality which teacher

candidates can experience in a variety of ways, I believe that the terms "baptism by fire"

and "reality shock" will continue to characterize most beginners' first year of teaching.

Super Teachers

Using Jason and Julia's experiences to move to the "what if" realm of a different

preservice format does not suggest that it is possible to graduate competent or proficient

teachers. Just as first graders are not expected to read Shakespeare, we should not expect

the beginning teacher to "start out teaching in possession of all the fully developed

qualities of a fine teacher" (Banner & Cannon, 1997, p. 6). Nor should teacher candidates

be given the impression that one year at a faculty of education can fully prepare them to

teach the following September.

Even if it is possible to graduate advanced beginners, it then becomes a school

board's responsibility to accept these teachers at this stage of professional development

and then actively support and encourage growth. Jason's and Julia's placements did not

take into account level of preparation or limited practical knowledge. Although the

workshops were of value, their impact and effectiveness could have been enhanced

through the assigning of mentors or peer teachers. Admittedly, the practicality of such

programs is at risk in these busy teaching times. However, in an interesting aside, I met a

retired teacher recently on her way home from breakfast with other talented, new retirees.

The talk around the table had centred on their willingness to volunteer time to be mentors

to first-year teachers in an effort to pass on experience and practical knowledge. This

gives me hope that although some unsustainable avenues for collegial support may be

closing down, new options may be waiting to be opened up.

<u>Recommendations for Practice and Research</u>

Although it is interesting to speculate about and create, at least on paper, a

different approach to teacher education, my original motivation for this study was to

better understand the gap between preservice preparation and practice in order to enhance

my own collegial and classroom corner of the world. The insights I have gained into the

perceptions of teacher candidates and beginning teachers will enable me to alter my

practices as an associate teacher in the following ways:

      ✐ Before teaching selected lessons I will communicate to candidates the criteria

         that were used in choosing the materials for the lesson, including the reasons why

         other materials and methods were not used.

      ✐ After these selected lessons have been taught, I will relate in detail the thoughts

         and choices that directed and re-directed my teaching.

      ✐ Discussions surrounding the candidate's planning and teaching will focus on

connecting the "why," "how," and "what" of classroom practice, and on how a teacher's choices are informed by the students' needs and abilities.

✐ Candidates will be encouraged and assisted in giving voice to their own in-action teaching thoughts and in becoming aware of the issues that should underlie their curricular and management choices.

✐ Candidates will be encouraged to bring descriptions from professional issues courses into the classroom and assisted in making the connections between these topics and their beginning practice.

Looking beyond my practice to the future of studies such as this one, I suggest that it would be interesting to follow beginning teachers from the month before they begin practice until the end of their second year. The second year of teaching may put some of their first-year perceptions about the quality of preservice preparation into a context that this one-year study was not able to reach. As well, I believe that the connection between thinking like a teacher and surviving practice is well worth further study, particularly at the preservice level. Would the ability to understand the implicit expectations of the job alter novice teachers' perceptions of their preparation programs and their eventual ability to survive and thrive during the first year of practice?

Final Words

The methodological goal of this study was to ensure that Julia's and Jason's stories were taken seriously and that their perceptions of their first year as classroom teachers were presented with clarity and accuracy. Their candid sharing of experiences, thoughts, and classrooms made it possible for me to record and report their stories with

detail and emotion. Consequently, I am indebted to them for their perseverance with this research. In a final effort to remain true to the telling of this story in the teachers' words, I leave the last thought about first-year experiences to Julia:

> Upon reflecting back, it's like tree planting. When you're there, you're having a really hard time and you're saying to yourself, "I'm never going to go back." And then summer's over and halfway through the winter you're saying, "Oh, that wasn't *that* bad I could do it again." (Ju5J12)

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Appendix A

Description of the Consecutive Program Requirements
(from the university's Faculty of Education Calendar)

To qualify for a Bachelor of Education candidates must complete a program having the equivalent of five credits made up of courses in Curriculum, Educational Studies, Program Focus, Professional Studies, and Practicum.

Curriculum
Candidates must complete the equivalent of two credits in Curriculum. The courses are numbered between CURR 303 and 379.

Educational Studies
Candidates must complete at least one half credit from the Educational Studies area.

Professional Studies
Candidates must complete one credit in Professional Studies, comprised of two required half credit courses, PROF 100, *Critical Issues and Policies*, and PROF190, *Theory and Professional Practice.*

Practicum
All candidates take PRAC 190, which consists of an extended school placement in the Fall term, a three-week alternate placement in the Winter term, and a further three-week school placement at the end of the program.

Description of the Primary-Junior Components

Curriculum (2.0 credits)
CURR 355 (0.5) Language
CURR 356 (0.5) Mathematics, Science, and Technology
CURR 357 (0.5) Personal and Social Studies
CURR 358 (0.5) The Arts

Educational Studies (0.5 credit)

Professional Studies (1.0 credit)
PROF 100 (0.5) Critical Issues and Policies
PROF 190 (0.5) Professional Practice

Practicum (1.0 credit)

Description of the Outdoor and Experiential Education Program

The Outdoor and Experiential Education Program Track is intended to facilitate integration of conventional teacher education and preparation for leading dynamic school and community-based outdoor education activities. Courses are based on experiential education theory with emphasis on methodologies appropriate to a variety of environmental contexts and to all teaching subjects. Also considered are the development, organization, operation, and evaluation of experiential education programs. These include community education, adventure programming, integrated learning, rehabilitation for special populations, expeditionary learning, and environmental education.

Admission

Applicants must meet the regular admission requirements for all B.Ed. candidates applying to the Primary-Junior or the Intermediate-Senior options. Applicants should have education and work experience that would enable them both to contribute and profit from OEE. A strong academic discipline is an advantage. Career interests with a service orientation and readiness to teach in settings whose values draw on humanistic foundations are seen as desirable. In addition to grades and completion of a Personal Statement of Experience, the readiness of applicants will be assessed by a résumé, letters of reference and other documentation. In some instances, personal interviews may be arranged. Candidates are required to have current certificates in cardiopulmonary resuscitation, standard first aid, and life saving (or equivalent) before graduation. It is an advantage to have these certificates on admission.

Appendix B

Record of Meeting Times with Teachers

Date	Teacher	Details of Meeting
August 12, 1999	Julia	First Meeting at the Faculty (Notes made)
August 20, 1999	Jason	First Meeting at a restaurant (Notes made)
September 4, 1999	Jason	Conversation at a restaurant (Notes made and journal shared)
September 11, 1999	Julia	Conversation at my home (#1 Tape recorded)
September 28, 1999	Julia	Classroom Observation (Notes made)
September 28, 1999	Jason	Classroom Observation (Notes made)
October 3, 1999	Julia	Conversation at my home (#2 Tape recorded)
October 23, 1999	Jason	Conversation at a restaurant (#1 Tape recorded)
November 2, 1999	Jason	Material for quilt delivered to classroom
November 5, 1999	Jason	Decorated squares picked up from classroom
November 9, 1999	Jason	Finished quilt delivered to classroom
November 25, 1999	Jason	Cooking in the classroom
November 25, 1999	Julia	Classroom visit at recess

Date	Teacher	Details of Meeting
December 2, 1999	Jason	Cooking in the classroom
December 2, 1999	Julia	Classroom & after school visit
December 17, 1999	Jason	Turkey Luncheon—visited with both teachers and students
December 21, 1999	Julia & Jason	Delivered Christmas treats to classes
January 8, 2000	Julia & Jason	Dinner at my home
January 13, 2000	Jason	Cooking in the classroom
January 13, 2000	Julia	Conversation at recess
January 20, 2000	Jason	Cooking in the classroom
January 20, 2000	Julia	Conversation at recess
January 23, 2000	Jason	Conversation at a restaurant (#2 Tape recorded)
February 12, 2000	Julia	Conversation at my home (#3 Tape recorded)
April 29, 2000	Jason	Conversation at a restaurant (#3 Tape recorded)
May 10, 2000	Julia	Conversation at my home (#4 Tape recorded)
May 15, 2000	Julia	Classroom visit (Notes made)
July 21, 2000	Julia	Conversation at my home (#5 Tape recorded)
August 7, 2000	Jason	Quick conversation

Appendix C

Definitions of the Terms Used in this Study

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Novice Teacher	The commonplaces of the teaching environment must be discriminated and the elements of the tasks labeled and learned. The novice must gain experience, often seeing real-world experience as more important than theoretical information.
Advanced Beginner	As experience is gained, the novice becomes an advanced beginner. Experience is melded with verbal knowledge and case knowledge is accumulated. Similarities across contexts are recognized. But lacking meaningful past episodes and cases to relate the experience of the present, these teachers often remain unsure of themselves.
Competent Teacher	Characteristic of this stage is the acceptance of full personal responsibility for instruction and a sense of personal agency. Competent teachers make conscious choices about what they are going to do, setting priorities and making plans. They have rational goals and choose sensible means for reaching these ends. Using their experience, they know what to attend to and what to ignore.
Proficient Teacher	Proficiency is marked by fast, fluid, and flexible behavior. About the fifth year, a modest number of teachers may move to this stage. Here intuition or know-how become prominent. Out of the experience accumulated comes a holistic way of viewing practice. These teachers recognize similarities across events that novices miss, yet they are still likely to be analytic and deliberative decision makers.
Expert Teacher	Experts do not consciously choose what to attend to and what to do. They have both an intuitive grasp of the situation and seem to sense in nonanalytic and nondeliberative ways the appropriate response to be made. They show fluid, effortless performance.

Compiled from Berliner, 1994, pp. 6-10.

Reflection Type	**Nature of Reflection**
Technical Rationality	Level 1: Technical Beginning to examine, often with peers the use of essential skills. Ideas are drawn from a given theory base and interpreted in light of personal worries and limited experiences.
Reflection-on-action	Level 2: Descriptive Analyzing one's teaching, usually alone, and giving reasons for actions taken. Developmental and personal seeking of best possible practice. Level 3: Dialogic Hearing one's own voice alone or with colleagues to explore alternative ways to solve professional problems. The deliberate weighing of competing ideas and viewpoints and exploring alternative solutions. Level 4: Critical Thinking about the effects of one's actions upon others as well as taking into account the social, political, or cultural aspects of practice. Seeing as problematic according to ethical criteria, the goals and values of the profession.
Reflection-in-action	Level 5: Contextualization of Multiple Viewpoints Dealing with on-the-spot professional problems as they arise. Thinking can be recalled and shared with others after the event. Drawing on any of the previous four possibilities as applied to situations as they are actually taking place.

Compiled from Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 45.