

When theory meets practice: What student teachers learn from guided reflection on their own classroom discourse

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Abstract

Drawing on extant theorizing and research on reflective teaching, this paper discusses the impact of an innovative methods course designed around the activity of student teachers' reflections on their own classroom discourse, for their understandings of the connections between theory and practice. Situated in the context of foreign language pre-service teacher education in Israel, and focusing on one aspect of a larger research study on the connections that student teachers make between theory and practice, this paper presents three exemplary cases of student teachers' learning. The connections exhibited by these three student teachers between theory (principles of pedagogy) and practice (the classroom discourse patterns that characterized their teaching) were interpreted as: (1) understanding how practice fits theory; (2) connecting theory and practice to generate grounded theories of practice; and (3) developing practical theories. We discuss these findings as related to the idiosyncratic character of students teachers' learning and to activities in teacher education that enhance reflection on the meeting between theory and practice.

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1. The theory–practice debate in teacher education

Over the past three decades, the scholarship of teacher education has articulated important contributions to how theory and practice should be conceptualized, inquired, and integrated in a curriculum for teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Loughran, 2003; Shulman, 1987; Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003). Specifically, the field has engaged in serious talk and thinking about

competing tenets of the theory–practice debate i.e. whether theory precedes or follows practice; whether practice (re)constructs theory, or whether theory and practice exist in dialectic relationship (Smagorinsky et al., 2003). A broad outlook at the sixties up to the early eighties reveals prevalent views that dichotomize between theoretical knowledge (knowing what) and practical knowledge (knowing how) as two separate bodies of knowledge (Smagorinsky et al., 2003). The impact of constructivist and social constructivist thinking on learning and education in the late eighties (Engestrom, 2001; Tillema & van der Westhuizen, 2006), along with a 'come back' to concepts such as learning from experience (Dewey, 1933), led to a shift from the 'theory–practice divide' to a view of theory–practice

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as constituted dialectically (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Loughran, 2003), through the notion of reflective practice (Schon, 1983). Despite the strong move towards reflective practice in teacher education agendas, there is a widespread call for moving beyond conceptual discussions, to provide more data-based accounts of the impact of particular teacher education activities for enhancing understandings on the meeting between theory and practice. This paper addresses such a call by examining the impact of an innovative methods course designed around the activity of student teachers' analysis of their *own* classroom discourse for the kind of connections that they make between theory and practice.

2. Merging theory and practice through reflective practice

The shift towards integrating theory and practice through dialectical processes of constructing, re-constructing and co-constructing theory, assumes a view of learning to teach as the development of reflective practice (Schon, 1987). In this vein, reflection for, in, and on practice has become a major pursuit in pre-service teacher education programs (Barlett, 1990; Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Laboskey, 1994; Loughran, 2003; Rodgers, 2002). This implies that, in learning to become a reflective teacher, prospective teachers would ideally acquire competencies that transcend technical thinking about 'what to do in the classroom' and engage in trying to establish relevant connections between theory and practice. In this process of reasoning 'why one does what one does' student teachers would be expected to learn to become attentive to practical, ethical, critical and transformational dimensions of the experience of learning to teach, leading to more informed and integrative understandings about their roles and practices (Benner, 1984; Eisner & Powell, 2002; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Van Manen, 1991). To enhance these connections, the development of reflective tasks has become a major concern in the design of teacher education programs.

3. Enhancing connections between theory and practice through reflective tasks

The question of how to enhance and intensify connections between theory and practice through reflective tasks has been, and still is, a major

challenge in teacher education. Feiman-Nemser (2001) attributes the difficulty in establishing connections between theory and practice to the weak relationship between course and field experiences, evidenced in the overall lack of coherence, fragmentation, weak pedagogy and lack of articulation in extant teacher preparation programs. In a similar vein, Woods (1991) and Kwo (1996) maintain that the structure of the preparation program often provides little time for reflection and for engaging in reflective tasks.

On the one hand, the difficulty to integrate meaningful reflective tasks can be understood against novices' pragmatic concerns and demands to be equipped with a concrete 'toolbox of ideas and activities' to survive their initial induction stages (Kagan, 1992; Olson & Osborn, 1991; Rust, 1994). To some extent, this expressed need might cast doubt on the relevance of ambitious expectations of teacher preparation programs to 'push' novices to more abstract connections and conceptualizations of learning to teach. On the other hand, however, there is a growing recognition that such 'survival kits' will be inadequate and useless if they are reduced to mere technical solutions, devoid of critical scrutiny and introspection into how novices' beliefs and theoretical knowledge shape their understandings of these tools in action (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). To this end, Feiman-Nemser (2001) draws our attention to the central task of pre-service education to engage prospective teachers in critical examination and articulation of the entering beliefs (or personal theories) which initially shape the meanings that they attribute to the experiences they encounter in light of compelling alternatives (p. 1017).

Acknowledging the need to critically scrutinize experience, programs recommend that student teachers be provided with direct experiences and ample opportunities to interact with and study pupils in systematic ways, and to make meaningful connections to the theoretical coursework (Bullough & Knowles, 1992; Calderhead, 1991; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). For example, Barlett (1990) proposes integrating tasks that display a series of key questions for formulating and addressing relationships between theory and practice at levels of mapping what they do as teachers; of informing (dealing with the question of the meaning of one's teaching); of contesting how one's present view of teaching has emerged; of appraising how might one teach differently, and of acting (what and how one will teach in the future). The outcome of such a process would eventually

prompt a changed outlook on one's practice, often generating new grounded theories subsequently guiding future actions (Cruickshank, 1987; Dewey, 1933; McTaggart & Kemmis, 1983). Most recently, programs recommend engaging in 'core' reflection that examines how core qualities such as empathy, compassion, flexibility, creativity and sensitivity operate to assist prospective teachers to make sense of how implicit personal theories play out in explicit practice (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Programs also propose structured reflective tasks to articulate dissonance (Kagan, 1992) in supportive learning environments (Jones & Vesilind, 1996), and to enhance cognitive and metacognitive processes of dynamic action and observation (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005). These proposals call for the need to extend our understandings of how such envisioned opportunities for merging between theory and practice are actually evidenced in prospective teachers' articulations and actions. This paper examines one such opportunity in pre-service education.

4. Research focus

Situated in the context of EFL pre-service teacher education in Israel, this paper examines three exemplary cases selected from a whole data set of 14 female EFL student teachers, as part of a larger study on the connections that student teachers make between theory and practice through examination of their own classroom discourse (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005). The purpose of this paper is two-fold: (1) to introduce and discuss the activity of student teachers' analysis of their own discourse, designed as a reflective task to enhance connections between theory and practice in pre-service education (2) to present three exemplary cases of student teachers' learning from the activity of analyzing and reflecting on their own classroom discourse.

The above discussed programmatic efforts to engage prospective teachers in meaningful connections between theory and practice, served as tentative theoretical templates for the design of the activity of student teachers' analysis of their own classroom discourse, detailed in the following sections.

5. The research context

5.1. The course and the participants

The data examined in this paper were collected during an EFL methods university course entitled

'Classroom Discourse: Student teachers examine their own practice'. The 1-year (two weekly academic hours) course, instructed by one of the researchers, took place at the teaching department of a major university in the north of Israel during the academic year of 2002. The course required of student teachers to conduct on-going readings on EFL methodology and on EFL classroom discourse, and to record, transcribe and reflect on one classroom lesson implemented in their practice teaching.

Drawing on theorizing and design of reflective frameworks in pre-service education, as described in earlier sections (Barlett, 1990; Dewey, 1933; Laboskey, 1994; Schon, 1983), the course set out to encourage student teachers' reflections on their teaching experience. Thus, it was envisioned that such a course would enhance reflection at levels of:

- mapping and naming predominant teaching and learning behaviors;
- connecting between theoretical notions and their realization in 'action';
- surfacing gaps between expectations and reality;
- interpreting teaching and learning in a particular context;
- scrutinizing and appraising particular teaching and learning behaviors;
- interpreting emergent views of teaching;
- implementing new and more informed actions.

The course aimed at a balance between the identification of strategies (what one does) and the process of reasoning that underlies student teachers' use of these strategies in the classroom (Orem, 1981; Shulman, 1987).

The tasks reflected the content of the course: core issues in communicative language teaching and their connection to issues in classroom discourse (as related to notions such as moves, patterns of turn-taking, and patterns of interaction). The meaning of the term 'classroom discourse' used in the course was similar to what Macbeth (2003) describes as 'naturally occurring discourse' (NOD). According to Macbeth this kind of discourse refers to 'talk, or conversation, or talk-in-interaction on ordinary and actual occasions' (p. 246). Since the course constituted a component of last year of studies of the teacher education program (within the Teacher Education department) and not of the linguistics program (in the English department), the course was not envisioned as a Linguistics course on

discourse but rather as a Methods course with an emphasis on the application of classroom discourse to teaching. Thus, during the sessions student teachers examined a variety of authentic classroom excerpts focusing on theoretical and practical connections between methodology and discourse.

6. Data collection: the reflective task

The final assignment required student teachers to reflect on their classroom discourse through a series of guiding questions provided by the course professor. The guiding questions for analyzing the transcribed lessons, drew on the cycle of reflective questions aimed at mapping, informing, contesting, appraising and acting (Barlett, 1990), as discussed in previous section. Student teachers were encouraged to address the following questions in their final papers: (1) What did I plan to achieve in this lesson and how do I plan to achieve these objectives? (2) What has the analysis of my discourse revealed about: gaps between what I think/I do/say/act and what actually happens? What I was surprised to discover? (3) What have I had learnt about myself, my pupils, and about teaching and learning? (4) What are my strengths as revealed in the discourse? (5) What would I like to change in my classroom discourse and how would I make those changes in my future teaching?

As can be seen from the guidelines, the questions aimed at the articulation of ‘the messy side of teaching’, by encouraging student teachers to write about gaps, surprises, discomforts and disappointments (rather than successes solely). The questions *legitimized* the articulation of dissatisfaction and dissonance, regarded as an important condition for learning (Strike & Posner, 1982).

The guidelines for the task were adapted from Fanselow’s (1987) procedures for the analysis of classroom lessons but differed in various ways: unlike Fanselow’s procedures which required student teachers to analyze an aspect of their teaching that they would like to focus on, participants were asked to select *a full lesson* in their practice teaching, audiotape it and transcribe it in its entirety.¹ The decision to analyze a full lesson (as opposed to specific aspects of their teaching) was based on several considerations which we regarded as unique

advantages of the task: one, it prompted student teachers to identify discourse patterns both at macro levels of lesson development, and at micro levels of connections between patterns of teaching/learning and specific stages during the lesson. Two, it created a context for reflection as close as possible to the real life 45 min lesson, allowing to trace specific patterns of teaching and of pupils’ language behavior throughout the whole lesson. In particular, we searched for a task that would drive student teachers away from their tendency as novices (Berliner, 2001) to ‘isolate’ particular instances or activities in a lesson, and from an emphasis on specific strategies and activities prevalent in traditional methods courses. Instead, the activity suggested a ‘multiple perspective’ approach to the interpretation of the 45 minute teaching experience. We envisioned that the transcription of the full lesson would enable student teachers to refer back and forth to specific patterns that recurred at various stages of the lesson, and to examine how the same discourse patterns acquire different forms and meanings throughout the discourse. A multiple perspective approach towards reflection on practice was, then, foreseen as potentially valuable for encouraging novices to focus on what they perceive as relevant i.e. their performance, but with a focus on the broader array of interactions that develop around their performance throughout the lesson, hence pushing them to reflect at a more multi-dimensional level.

Moreover, unlike Fanselow, student teachers were not asked to repeat the procedure of recording, transcribing and analyzing a new excerpt from their classroom interaction to evidence the changes they had implemented in their teaching in light of their first analysis. Although we recognize the value of the task for getting immediate and concrete feedback on new insights gained about teaching (Fanselow, 1987; Gebhard, Gaitan, & Oprandy, 1990), we opted for an in-depth single case approach. The decision was also guided by pragmatic considerations of the scope of the task of transcribing and analyzing an entire full lesson.

The reflective end of the year papers, which constitutes the data for the larger study, yielded a corpus of about 200 pages (14 student teachers—each paper around 15 pages) of reflections of student teachers on their own classroom discourse. Each paper included a reflective analysis of one transcribed taught lesson, organized around the ten guiding questions.

¹Students were asked to document turn taking, numbering each turn consecutively, drawing on transcription conventions (Sinclair & Brazil, 1982).

7. Data analysis

The analysis of the whole data set was conducted by the two researchers in two phases, following grounded theory procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The first phase entailed hermeneutic cycles of close interpretative readings (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994) of each paper, to identify recurrent themes that emerged from student teachers' attributions to their learning as related to the 10 guiding questions of the activity. The same process was repeated across cases to identify commonalities across all data sources. The second phase entailed the identification of categories of learning that pertained to *connections/gaps* that student teachers established between *theoretical principles of pedagogy and the classroom discourse patterns* that they identified as characteristic of their teaching. This was evident in the proliferation of phrases that denoted what student teachers said they had planned to do or had thought would be appropriate to do, and what they actually realized had happened during the lesson (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005).

In this paper, we focus on three exemplary cases (Maya, Rina and Adda's reflective papers) from the whole data set (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005). Our analysis focuses on student teachers' reflections on their transcribed lessons.² We have chosen to present these cases in depth because the three student teachers were particularly articulate about their learning, thus providing examples of 'exemplary cases' of connections between theory and practice (Shulman, 1986). Their reflections were particularly rich, vivid and sophisticated, exhibiting intricate levels of articulation of connections between theory and practice. Specifically, we describe and interpret *how* each student teacher reflected on her own discourse and conceptualize *what* kinds of connections between theory and practice each student teacher exhibited as a result of reflecting on the meeting between theory and practice.

The analysis revealed that Maya's learning was mainly oriented towards formulating understandings of how her practice accommodates with the theories that she learns. Thus, we conceptualized her learning as 'Understanding how practice fits theory'. Rina's learning exhibited complex connec-

tions between theory and practice leading her to the articulation of grounded theories of practice. We interpreted her learning as 'Connecting theory and practice to generate grounded theories of practice'. Adda focused primarily on taking a critical stance towards her practice, which we conceptualized as 'Developing practical theories'.

8. Maya's learning: understanding how practice fits theory

Maya's analysis of her teaching in a ninth grade level A class is characterized by her constant attempt to understand how practice fits the theory that she encountered in the methods course. Addressing the first questions about lesson objectives and activities, Maya begins by giving a detailed account of her lesson, which she planned according to theory, using theoretical terminology such as fluency, previous knowledge and inference: 'Since this is a strong class, one of the things I wanted to achieve is to allow for a variety of responses and ideas related to the main idea of the passage. In this way and following the new curriculum, I hoped to develop fluency and also to focus on specific language points that surface from their answers ... I also wanted to build on their previous knowledge and experiences, creating maximum opportunities for using English and for inferring from context rather than translating through the use of L1 ...'

Maya addresses the reflective questions that focus on both the gaps between stated objectives and their realization, and on her learning about herself. First, she uses theoretical notions from the literature to 'name' her moves, connecting the 'telling move' that she identifies in her discourse to its various functions in the literature: 'according to Sinclair and Brazil (1982), [telling connects to] informing, describing, explaining and finally demonstrating things to pupils ...'. She also makes connections between recurrent discourse patterns in her teaching, being critical about their impact on encouraging pupils' use of the target language (one of her stated objectives): '... the analysis of my moves however has taught me that I focus mostly on 'telling' which has an effect on the limiting amount of target language used by the pupils ...'. Finally, she elaborates on her realization of how these patterns reflect her tendency to dominate the discourse and what the implications are for student participation: 'I have realized that I tend to give a lot of informing remarks, which although serving to

²Due to constraints of length and given the scope of the present paper which focuses on the analysis of students' reflections on their classroom discourse, the transcribed lessons have not been included.

organize a discussion and giving a sense of structure, dominate the lesson, producing very long teacher talk chunks of language and limiting opportunities for free expression as I had initially envisioned in my plan ...'

Maya's reflections are mainly developed around the guiding questions in the reflective task that aimed at pushing student teachers to identify connections and gaps between theory and practice: (1) what the analysis reveals about gaps between plans, beliefs and actions, (2) what student teachers were surprised to discover about their teaching, and (3) what they learned about themselves as a result of reflecting on their discourse. In focusing on these questions, she makes connections and surfaces inherent gaps between the type of questions that she thinks she asks (i.e. her espoused theories) and what actually happens in the discourse: 'I also realized that although I thought I had asked many higher order, open questions, aiming at longer answers and at a more natural discourse on the part of the stronger pupils in class, I didn't. On the contrary, I used mostly informative-direct questions which required short answers, impeding from the stronger pupils to fully realize their potential and competence in English'.

Focusing on the question of what she has learned, Maya articulates an informed principle about teaching in general: 'My analysis reinforces the idea that a teacher's initiation controls the subsequent pattern of discourse (Sinclair & Brazil, 1982, p. 38). This means that I, as a teacher, by asking a particular type of questions stimulate a particular kind and length of answers ...' and about her teaching style in particular: 'this has shown me that my teaching style is definitely a controlling one ...'

In her reflections, Maya 'names' her predominant 'moves' using relevant theoretical notions, generates possible explanations on their effect on the quality of pupils' participation and learning and ramifies selected hypothesis on their consequences for enhancing a particular language point, becoming aware of inner complexities that her discourse generates and its implications for the controlling nature of her teaching style.

Consider the following excerpt from another section in her paper. First, she identifies and names another predominant move in her discourse: 'Rewarding moves provide positive feedback. This is a repeated pattern in my discourse. Usually I use an expression 'very good' in order to give positive feedback ...', connecting between 'rewarding

moves' and effective language teaching: 'I use positive feedback a lot because rewarding is one of the ways to encourage the development of a positive self-image, which is one of the principles of effective language teaching'. She then expands on this connection applying concepts from theory: '... Nunan supports this by claiming that positive feedback has two functions ... therefore the positive reinforcements that I gave, encouraged my pupils, according to Nunan, to suggest new ideas, and to perform the tasks that I gave them during the lesson. Nunan (1990) claims that according to research, stronger pupils are more likely to receive praise than weaker pupils'.

Using illustrative excerpts from her discourse, Maya articulates gaps between what she thought she was doing and what she actually did: '... For example, notice how in moves 85–88 I address the question to a particular pupil to involve her more in the lesson. Although I provide a rewarding statement at the beginning of her answer to indicate that she is "on the right track" in order to stimulate her to continue the answer and to raise her motivation I do not supply her any feedback at the end of her answer. Moreover, I do not give her an opportunity to end the answer she started with but I complete it myself. She then continues to give another example: 'Another example is in moves 137–140. This weak pupil who has addressed a question in order to involve her more in the discourse does not get any positive reinforcement about her answer, which is a correct one'.

As a result of articulating the gaps that she identifies, Maya articulates an emergent insight about her role in relation to the weaker pupils in the class: 'From these examples, I can conclude that weaker pupils do not receive the necessary feedback from me so that they can increase their motivation in order to continue to participate and contribute to class discussion. I, actually, intended to take upon myself the role of 'mother goose' who takes care of the weaker pupils when in fact I do exactly the opposite ...'

Finally, she consolidates the insights that she has gained by describing a plan for future action: 'I want to reduce the amount of teacher talk ... this will make the discourse more symmetrical in terms of the amount of teacher talk and student talk. This in turn will provide pupils with the opportunity to express themselves more in the target language ...'. Her plan of action suggests her new awareness of specific pupils' contribution to the discourse and of

the type of teacher talk that hinders or encourages participation. What characterizes the meeting between theory and practice in Maya's reflections?

Maya's reflections on her classroom discourse have enabled her to map what she does as a teacher, to inform on the implications of her actions for pupils' learning as well as to contest her view of teaching. Specifically, she has become aware that she focuses mostly on 'telling' and on its effect for limiting the amount of target language used by the pupils. She has also realized how her telling moves reflect her tendency to dominate the discourse and to produce very long stretches of teacher talk limiting, eventually, opportunities for free expression (one of her stated aims in her lesson plan). She has also learned that she uses mostly informative-direct questions which require short answers, impeding the stronger pupils from fully realizing their potential and competence in English.

Maya has also learned to connect theoretical notions to her own discourse, and as a result to better understand how theoretical principles (such as the way in which a teacher's initiation controls the subsequent pattern of discourse, or the way in which rewarding moves operate to provide feedback) actually play out in her own discourse and uncover the controlling nature of her teaching style and of her feedback. As a result, she is able to appraise her teaching by concluding that weaker pupils in her lessons do not receive the necessary feedback to be prompted to continue participating in the class discussion. From examining how theory fits with her practice, she also describes a plan for future action to reduce the amount of teacher talk so as to make the discourse more symmetrical and provide pupils with the opportunity to express themselves in the target language.

9. Rina's learning: connecting theory and practice to generate grounded theories of practice

Like Maya, Rina makes connections between theory and practice. In her analysis she reflects on how predominant discourse patterns in her teaching actually unfold her tacit views about communicative language teaching and shape, to a great extent, her teaching orientation. Unlike Maya, however, her reflections focus less on identifying theoretical notions in her practice and more on generating *new theories of practice* as a result of examining practice in light of theory. In the process, she articulates new insights and redefines 'known'

principles of pedagogy and of communicative methodology, generating more informed and local understandings of her practice.

Two main questions guide Rina's reflections: the question concerning gaps between theory and practice, and the question pertaining to what she has learned about herself and about teaching in general as a result of the activity. Already at the outset of her paper, Rina is critical about 'common theories' regarding language teaching: 'Contrary to what might be a common belief, lessons rarely begin with the mythical "good morning pupils–good morning teacher" interchange. Yet, this is not necessarily a bad thing. The more the pupils are exposed to authentic spontaneous discourse in the target language, the better'. In her reflections she exhibits, on the one hand, a theoretical understanding of the need for authentic exposure in communicative teaching, and on the other hand, a critical stance towards the 'myth of authentic exposure' as it plays out in the 'real' classroom situation. Notice how her elaboration continues: 'Nevertheless, too much of an "authentic mess" right at the very beginning may be unadvisable and even hazardous to the whole lesson in classes that are weaker, more problematic and even at a later time of the day. Therefore, even though spontaneity and authenticity are desirable, they may not always be suitable ...'

In a later section, Rina critically reconsiders the function of organizing talk in the discourse. First, like Maya, she defines or 'names' the term using relevant literature: 'Sinclair and Brazil (1982) refer to "organizing talk" as "the kind of talk which concerns time other than the immediate moment of the utterance" and which "may focus on the activity that is to come, or has recently passed ...". However, in contrast to Maya, who focuses on finding the 'equivalent' of theoretical notions in her own discourse, Rina contests the notion of 'organizing talk' in the literature: 'I believe this kind of talk to be predominant in every teacher's discourse and while it may generally be an attempt to clarify things for the pupils, it is very often the teacher who benefits from it even more'. Her argument is then extended to the generation of a refined, grounded principle: 'organizing talk gives the teacher an opportunity to organize his or her own thoughts and moves, especially when switching from one activity to another'.

Throughout her reflections, Rina does not only identify and name predominant patterns sustaining

them with relevant theory but also takes a critical stance towards the dissonances that she identifies between theory and practice as they play out in her teaching. In doing so, she contests and appraises ‘theory’ from different perspectives: ‘On the one hand, if future research confirms the value of elaboration over modification, it will strengthen the view that when talking to second language learners, teachers should try to use elaborated rather than simplified language ... (Nunan, 1991, p. 191). On the other hand, I am not certain whether this approach is adequate when giving instructions’.

Rina considers the advantages and disadvantages of her predominant patterns: ‘In an attempt to be as lucid as possible, I come up with a rather tedious and confusing explanation ... Yet, my preference for authentic language which actually enhances exposure in the target language ... comes at the expense of clarity perhaps’. Furthermore, in her appraisal of the advantages and disadvantages of her elaborations during the lesson, she formulates a principle: ‘Even though diversions and digressions from the original topic are features of every real life communicative situation, they may not be advisable when giving second language learners instructions in the target language’. The new principle develops, in turn, into a plan for future action: ‘Hence, in this particular case it would have been better to clear out the meaning of the word ... before giving instructions’.

Notice how, by contrast to Maya who focuses on what ‘she does or does not do according to theory’ in relation to her questioning and initiation moves, Rina focuses on challenging the conventional meanings attributed to the notion of ‘initiation moves’ in theory: ‘It is not sufficient to initiate a discussion as Sinclair and Brazil (1982, p. 22) contend by “questioning, probing for answers, stimulating various kinds of talk and involving pupils to commit themselves”...’. In doing so, she also offers a new conjecture regarding initiation moves, one which is grounded in her own experience: ‘It is not enough to initiate a discussion only once. In order to keep that kind of talk going, one has to keep questioning and in a sense initiating again and again ...’.

The activity of analyzing her own discourse has prompted Rina to contest her views with theory and as a result, to better appraise what she does as a teacher, and how her views about teaching reflect her actions. In the process, she formulates new

hypotheses and grounded theories regarding key notions in communicative language teaching such as spontaneity and authenticity, organizing talk, elaborate and simplified language, diversions and digressions, and social distance. What characterizes the meeting between theory and practice in Rina’s reflections?

The kind of connections that Rina makes between theory and practice can be described as of a complex and critical nature. Throughout her reflections, she does not only focus on redefining ‘known’ pedagogical principles in light of practice, but also on generating more informed and local understandings of ‘taken for granted’ educational values and principles. Finally, in the last section of her paper, Rina turns to her agenda as educator, sharing with the reader the new insights that she has gained about the notion of ‘social distance’ as a result of her reflections: ‘... I have become aware that I get through the pupils much more easily when I maintain less ‘social distance’ as Holmes refers to. Being less formal does not however mean breaking all boundaries of courtesy and respect. I do believe, however, that respect should be mutual. I thought it may sound quite obvious, but in practice it is sad to see how many teachers demand respect from their pupils but fail to return it’.

10. Adda’s learning: developing practical theories

Our third illustrative case considers Adda’s learning. Like Maya and Rina, Adda focuses her analysis on identifying gaps between theory and practice. Unlike the former, however, her major concern is on the practical applications that emerge from her reflections ‘on action’.

Throughout her paper, Adda focuses mostly on the question of what her analysis reveals about her own teaching, and on the gaps that she identifies between her planning (according to theory) and her actions. In her analysis she describes her actions in detail: ‘The analysis of my discourse has revealed a serious gap between what I think I do and what actually happens ... I was counting on a rich, opening discussion, then a nice, oral analysis of the passage, followed by tasks in a worksheet and finishing with a task regarding home schooling, its advantages and disadvantages ... instead the lesson took a different turn and unfortunately did not come out as smoothly as planned ...’.

Like Maya, the gaps that she identifies prompt her to reflect on how her discourse patterns affect

the development of the lesson: ‘I try, throughout this discussion, to elicit the idea of “shortening the school week” from the students, but it just does not work. Instead of realizing after three or four tries that they are not going to mention this idea, I insist on asking them the same question over and over again. Moreover, not only the discussion itself turns out to be very poor, the students do not interact, they just list things ...’.

As she examines gaps between her stated objectives and her discourse she becomes aware of the gap ‘between [her] explanations and repetitions of things and pupils’ reaction to them’. Like Maya, she also learns about the type of responses that characterize particular pupils: ‘... the only interaction that occurs is when Roman tries to help Dekel with his answer...’, something which she claims to have been unaware of prior to analyzing her discourse.

Unlike Rina, however, she does not articulate a revised principle about her teaching, but rather contests the consequences of her actions for pupil participation: ‘It is as though the pupils are detached from the lesson. This bothers me because this is not the regular case of a noisy class where one cannot hear the other. While I was explaining something, the class was quiet, so I expected everyone to hear me, and therefore understand what I was saying ...’. Indeed, a unique aspect of Adda’s reflections pertains to her strong emphasis on the linguistic behaviors of particular pupils in her class, a perspective which she claims to have been insensitive to and unaware of prior to her analysis. Quoting from her own lesson transcript she writes: ‘... I have realized that Arik, Dror, Roman and Dekel [boys in the class] have a good level of vocabulary. The girls Lilach, Dana and especially Tali, need a lot of revision. Arik is always the first and last to speak during the lesson. Dana seems to be having quite a hard time understanding the answers when we go over them. This is first noticed in move 247... After I explain the answer to Tali she tells me to explain again (move 252). I tell Dana to explain the answer to Tali but it is Arik who eventually does the job for her ... As for Dekel, he comes back to life when I ask the class a question related to adjectives (276) ...’.

Adda does not extend the insights that she gains about particular pupils to the generation of a grounded principle about her practice or to the formulation of a personal theory as Rina does. Nevertheless, the analysis serves to uncover pre-

dominant moves as well as to learn about particular pupils’ level of proficiency. These understandings help her, in turn, to think about appropriate strategies to modify future practice: ‘... I could have sat down with the girls and helped them to answer the questions in the worksheet or I could have told the strong pupils to sit next to the weaker ones and do the worksheet together ... I could have addressed some of the oral questions to specific pupils and not to the general class—maybe that would have enhanced participation. As mentioned earlier, I tend to say “No” quite often when pupils’ answers are incorrect. This is something I know I have to change, because it creates an atmosphere of testing and it can basically shut the students, demotivating them ... I believe also that pausing between questions or between explanations can decrease tensions and does not accelerate the pupils into making a quick move ... I would like to change my habit of repeating everything I believe it is not a good technique ...’. What characterizes the meeting between theory and practice in Adda’s learning?

Adda has shown evidence of a developing personal practical theory. In her reflections she maps and appraises her teaching by becoming aware of what she does as a teacher, about what particular pupils do in her lessons, and how this reflects her teaching style on the one hand, and specific pupils’ learning style on the other hand. Adda is also very explicit about the new insights that she has gained regarding future actions, which led her to articulate a detailed, revised plan of action. Her reflections highlight her strong orientation towards application, as well as her shift in thinking about teaching from a teacher focused view to a more student-focused view.

The multifaceted and distinctive connections that Maya, Rina and Adda exhibited at levels of mapping, naming, generating explanations, contesting, formulating theories, appraising and planning for action, shed light on the idiosyncratic forms and meanings that the meeting between theory and practice can take in student teachers’ learning. They also illuminate on the potential of the activity of student teachers’ analysis of their own discourse for enhancing manifold articulations of learning. So, what can be learned about the potential of a methods course structured around the activity of student teachers’ analysis own classroom discourse for fostering connections between theory and practice?

11. When theory meets practice: idiosyncratic connections

The study reveals that, indeed, the structure of the course was conducive to new and multifaceted understandings about the meeting between theory and practice, and that these understandings were of a highly idiosyncratic nature. Consequently, although we could roughly align the three cases along a linear continuum of ‘applied theory’ (Maya’s case), ‘grounded theory’ (Rina’s case) and ‘practical theory’ (Adda’s case), each case exhibited unique connections between theory and practice at various levels of mapping, contesting, informing, appraising and planning. Furthermore, although the three cases might share the characteristics of what Laboskey (1994) would describe as an ‘alert novice’, Maya’s ‘alertness’ as related to the application of theory, to strategic thinking as a teacher, and to children’s learning differed inherently from Adda’s alertness as related to practical insights, and from Rina’s alertness pertaining to her grounded understandings of theory and practice.

The idiosyncratic character of the meeting between theory and practice exhibited in each case, thus, makes us wonder, whether as teacher educators it is altogether possible (or desirable) to expect student teachers to exhibit particular ‘targeted’ connections between theory and practice through certain forms of reflection. Rather, given the complex web of tensions and gaps that were eminent in the meeting between the theory and practice in the three cases, academic spaces designed to foster connections between these two need to take into account the multiple and arbitrary outcomes that the meeting might engender, and which seem hard to anticipate.

The multifaceted connections that student teachers exhibited on the meeting between theory and practice also shed an optimistic light on the potential of novices to reflect at levels beyond ‘what works in the classroom’ (Almarza, 1996). The connections evidenced in the three cases, and especially in Rina’s case, challenge prevalent conceptions that pre-service teachers are mostly concerned with establishing a positive rapport with their pupils (Antonek, McCormick, & Donato, 1997; Kwo, 1996), and pay less attention to the ‘educational’ side of teaching (Hollingsworth, 1989), and to possible connections to the theory of their course work (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Kwo, 1996; Popkewitz, 1978). As the study suggests, it is

possible to contend that pre-service teachers *can* reflect beyond survival skills, articulate multiple concerns about their practice, and think about them in an integrative manner (Conway & Clark, 2003; Guillaume & Rudney, 1993; Kalekin-Fishman & Eden, 2003), if given the appropriate conditions to do so (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005).

12. Analyzing your own classroom discourse: conditions that foster connections between theory and practice

The various forms and meanings exhibited in student teachers’ reflections of their classroom discourse have also shed light on the conditions that allowed for connections between theory and practice to be articulated. For one, we have learned that the activity of student teachers’ examination of their own discourse constituted an important opportunity for becoming aware of unexpected student behavior, such as in Adda’s case, and for ‘experiencing dissatisfaction with initial ideas’ (Jones & Vesilind, 1996). These, in turn, challenged them to examine connections and gaps between theory and practice, beliefs and actions. As student teachers analyzed how ingrained patterns of interaction in their discourse affected the development of the lesson, pupils’ production of language, and their quality of participation, they began to ‘break’ with certain initial rigid beliefs about what constitutes ‘good’ and effective communicative language teaching.

We have also learned that a formal academic course structured around specific guidelines for the analysis of student teachers’ own classroom discourse, seems to offer a context for experiencing discomfort in a safe learning environment. Having stated this, however, the question of how much control pre-service teachers need to be given, in order to reflect on their actions (Johnson, 1996) is still valid. In this respect, the three exemplary cases show that contrary to orientations that forward open-ended and non-evaluative tasks, the structured conditions provided for by the guidelines of the course assignment, along with its formal and evaluative nature, promoted reflection. Specifically, the instructions encouraging student teachers to be critical about their practice, together with the knowledge that they would be ‘graded’ on their ability to portray and reflect on the messy side of their teaching, were important instrumental incentives that ‘pushed’ student teachers to reflect beyond

their technical performance. Thus, the activity seems to have allowed for the right combination of novices' instrumental motives to succeed in the task (getting a good grade) and legitimizing problems and dilemmas (congruent with their need as novices to voice frustrations).

In addition to emphasizing the legitimate value of 'being critical towards practice', another condition that enhanced reflection was the fact that student teachers were asked to reflect on their *own* practice. Indeed, student teachers could see the relevance of their reflections for their future teaching because they themselves taught the lessons that they analyzed (and not their cooperating teachers). This created 'intensified ownership, responsibility and increased opportunity to experience the unexpected' (Jones & Vesilind, 1996, p. 115), as well as preparation to enter the real world where the responsibility is shifted onto them (Bailey et al., 1996; Gebhard, 1990; Kierstead, 1985).

We also wonder, as Kagan (1992) does, about the amount of tension that is helpful or harmful to pre-service teachers as they learn to teach. The 'right amount of gap' to enable student teachers to transform discomfort into a learning opportunity is, however, difficult to predict, and seems to depend on a variety of personal, interpersonal and contextual factors. We might wonder, for example, whether a student teacher with different dispositions from those exhibited by Maya, would describe his/her awareness of the gaps between theory and practice as a sign of growth. We also raise the question of the stage at which student teachers would benefit most from being 'pushed' to identify gaps and to establish meaningful connections between theory and practice during pre-service education (Mazor, 2003).

13. Creating spaces for observing teaching from within

Constituting a kind of 'interim' situated practice, student teachers' analysis of their own discourse created a new form of 'vivid practice', one which provides a space for integrating the recall of a memorable and emotionally charged event, such as the classroom teaching event, with a more analytical and 'objective' stance towards performance by encouraging student teachers to 'observe teaching from within'. We also believe that student teachers' reflections on their own discourse can be transferred to other courses in teacher education programs.

Student teachers can be assisted, for example, to conceptualize experiences during student teaching as they relate to theoretical notions acquired in theoretical courses.

We are, however, aware that 'observing teaching from within' through systematic reflection on one full lesson rather than over a series of lessons, does not allow for surfacing the changes that student teachers might experience throughout a course. We acknowledge this as a limitation of the study, when compared to studies that followed processes of change in practice teaching over time (Gebhard, 1990). Furthermore, although student teachers' reflected on the value of the experience for becoming aware of inherent gaps between plan and action, we believe that conducting student teachers' interviews at the termination of the program, would have served as further evidence for validating understandings about the potential of a reflective task that is designed within a formal course of instruction.

We are also aware that one should be cautious of the long-term effects of the experience. We might ask, for example, whether student teachers' newly articulated insights about their teaching, will eventually stand the 'test' of novices' professional socialization during the first years of induction into school, usually marked by regression to known and safe patterns (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). With this insight in mind, our research is now being extended to focus on the long-term impact of the course on the focal participants' practice during their first years of teaching.

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