

# **Telling is not Teaching, Listening is not Learning**

## **New Teacher Education Practices from a Critical Friendship**

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The authors are experienced teacher educators collaborating across distance and cultures to serve as critical friends to each other as we explore the introduction of new teacher education practices in our classes and collaborate to interpret the effects of those new practices. From our first meeting in 2010, we have shared similar goals and perspectives, despite teaching preservice teachers in different languages and cultural contexts. Email, Skype and Duo have made it possible not only to discuss and document our practices and their underlying assumptions but also to observe each other's classroom practices directly. During the early years of our collaboration, we shared teaching experiences and developed common ground. This report of our shared self-study experiences draws data from the period 2015-2019; during that period of closer collaboration, each of us has been able to visit the other's classroom in person at least once each year. Rodrigo has more than 20 years of teacher education experience; Tom has more than 40.

### **Aim/Objectives**

The purpose of our dialogues about introducing new teaching education practices is not only to improve our practices (in the eyes of our students and each other) but also to develop greater understanding of common assumptions (both our own and those of the cultures in which we teach) about how to improve the ways that we try to help beginning teachers learn to teach. Our particular focus is on introducing new practices to develop and enhance the quality of teacher candidates' professional learning from experience.

## Theoretical Perspectives

Teacher candidates and their teacher educators frequently speak of gaps between theory and practice. Some teacher educators have challenged our profession to reduce those gaps and model new practices, but that challenge has gained little traction. In the words of Leinhardt et al. (1995), “the task before us . . . is to enable learners to make universal, formal, and explicit knowledge that often remains situational, intuitive, and tacit; and to transform universal, formal, explicit knowledge for use *in situ*” (p. 403).

Bryan and Abell (1999) emphasized the importance of experience in learning to teach and also identified problematic assumptions in traditional program structures:

The heart of knowing how to teach cannot be learned from coursework alone. The construction of professional knowledge requires experience. Experience influences the frames that teachers employ in identifying problems of practice, in approaching those problems and implementing solutions, and in making sense of the outcomes of their actions. (pp. 121-122)

They then concluded that “the genesis of the process of developing professional knowledge should be seen as inherent in experience” (p. 136). “A preeminent goal of . . . teacher education should be to help prospective teachers challenge and refine their ideas about teaching and learning . . . and learn how to learn from experience” (p. 137). We set ourselves the same goal.

Hagger and McIntyre (2006) put the issue more directly, suggesting that we need to re-think how teaching expertise is developed in initial teacher education (ITE):

The theory-into-practice conception of ITE that dominated the twentieth century is fundamentally flawed and needs to be replaced. The notion that student teachers should learn good theoretical ideas in universities, and then put them into practice in schools, is flawed in many ways but most obviously in that it is based on quite false conceptions of the nature of teaching expertise and of how such expertise is developed. (p. 158)

Our collaboration focused on several principles related to learning from experience in teacher education, including the following:

1. Learning from experience in the practicum is uniquely different from learning theory, policies, and procedures in the university classroom.
2. Learning from experience generates craft knowledge that is tacit; it is tested in ways that are uniquely different from the familiar verification processes associated with propositional knowledge.
3. Learning how to learn from experience should be an essential feature of initial teacher

education.

Always in the background, as we write are several points made by Donald Schön (1971) when arguing that we must move beyond the “stable state.” “Our society and all of its institutions are in *continuing* processes of transformation. . . . The task . . . for the person, for our institutions, for our society as a whole is to learn about learning” (p. 30). Sarason (1971) made a strong case for the reluctance of schools and universities to change. We worked not only to find better practices but also to model how a teacher can do that.

## Methods

The qualitative methods of self-study research (LaBoskey, 2004) were used to identify patterns and themes in a range of data, including personal journals, notes, and recordings of our discussions, students’ anonymous comments at the end of many classes, and notes of individual conversations with students. Although our data sets are not identical, they included the following:

- Personal journal of before-class plans and after-class notes
- Recorded discussions with each other.
- Students’ anonymous “tickets out of class” collected at the end of each class to indicate the main points they had taken from each lesson and topics they wished to explore further.
- Excerpts from students’ email messages, one-on-one conversations, and in-class writings that speak to their interpretation of class discussions and activities.

Data also include video-recordings of many of Tom’s classes for sharing with Rodrigo.

Our approach to our critical friendship is captured in the following statement about professional dialogue:

Professional dialogue allows researchers to explore ideas, theories, concepts, and practice so that the understandings or assertions for action uncovered provide a basis for confident action: physical, mental, or explanatory. Once an idea is put forward in this method of inquiry, it is met with reflection, critique, supportive anecdote, or explanation and analysis which interrogates and thus establishes the power of the learning as a basis for meaning making, understanding, or practical action. In dialogue, practice, theory, and experience are intertwined. (Guilfoyle et al., 2004, p. 1109)

It is often argued that having a critical friend is an important feature of self-study research. In this research we agreed that each would act as a critical friend to the other’s self-study and we accepted the following characteristics of critical friendship (Schuck & Russell, 2005, pp. 119-120):

- A critical friendship works in two directions. It is not solely for the person whose teaching is being studied; the critical friend also expects benefits.
- A critical friendship becomes an additional layer of self-study and should be documented and revisited just as teaching practice is studied and reframed.
- A critical friendship offers critique of teaching practices for the critical friend as much as for the person conducting the self-study.
- A major part of critical friendship is the role it plays in supporting and encouraging the practitioner's self-study of practice.
- Context is central to understanding of the practice, and discussion of context should precede and support observations and discussion of teaching.

## Data

Both authors agreed to use tickets-out-of-class as an initial indicator of students' responses to a class; quarter-sheets of paper are distributed at the end of class with two questions: "What is the most important idea you are taking from this class?" and "What topic in today's class would you like to understand better?" These are always completed anonymously, although students might later volunteer and extend their comments in individual conversations. Additional data include our email messages to each other about class experiences, Rodrigo's comments to Tom after observing a class using Skype, and notes taken during discussions via Skype.

### *Rodrigo's New Practices*

Rodrigo's first goal was to increase ways of listening to his students, both to better understand their various responses to his classes and to build a stronger relationship with students. He has found that there is more trust between teacher and student when students feel that their teacher is actively listening to them. He also found that the teacher-student relationship becomes less top-down.

Two additional changes in practice involved the analysis of class experiences.

First, a critical friend decreases the traditional experience of teaching as an isolated adventure. He welcomed the reduction in a sense of privacy and the opportunity to resolve a puzzling situation through writing about it to another teacher educator.

Paradoxically, the value is not in taking his critical friend's recipe to replace his own but in coming to see his teaching through a new lens. Second, the relationship with a critical friend encouraged Rodrigo to take risks in his teaching and in so doing to move into the domain of double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974), with the associated opportunity to identify the assumptions underlying various teaching practices. It is one thing to make changes in practice; it is equally or more important to understand the rationales that support specific changes.

Table 1 describes Rodrigo's new practices and his students' comments. Each of the four new practices is followed by a statement in italics of his initial response to the students' responses.

### **Table 1**

#### *Rodrigo's New Practices and the Results*

The Idea	The New Practice	Sample Student Responses
<p>Trusting your students involves much more than saying to them “You are important to me.”</p>	<p>Give voice to the students by closing every class by asking them “What was the most important topic in this class? and “What question do you want to study more?” In the next class, quickly share and respond to their comments.</p>	<p>“Are our questions really important for you?”  “When I listened to some of your comments and questions, I could see your point of view. Why don’t the other teachers do something similar, because there we only listen or sleep?”</p>
<p>The comments and questions were surprising because they showed different viewpoints about the class. This approach seemed risky at first because some of their responses are unpredictable and unexpected.</p>		
<p>The teacher can share the talking that occurs in the class. In the Chilean cultural context it is common that the teacher does most of the talking. Students are there to respond to the teacher’s questions.</p>	<p>Encourage sharing in the class, making it a real option for students to express their opinions, organizing the topics to include their voices.</p>	<p>Some students say “Here we feel more like a teacher, because our voice is added to the class” and “You invite us to have a position about the topics in the class.”  Other students make comments such as “Why do we need to talk about these topics?” and “You are the teacher and I expect you to tell me what I must do.”</p>
<p>I sensed that the students felt more engaged and more open to showing me how they are thinking about different topics.</p>		
<p>The power of firsthand experience is greater than the power of books. Books are commonly seen as presenting the rules for good teaching but, in Schön’s (1995) view, “the new scholarship requires a new epistemology.”</p>	<p>Begin by sharing experiences in an environment free of judgment. Then encourage them to make connections to what they are reading.</p>	<p>“In this class I feel like a professional because my experience is taken seriously.”  “In other classes the teacher connects with us like school students, asking how well we remembered the references in books. Here we connect our experience with the references.”</p>

I was surprised by the power of their experiences and how experience is a catalyst for developing strong connections to the knowledge presented in books. Starting with theory is not the same.

Inviting students to form a circle for discussion can create space for significant professional development.

Invite students with recent school experiences to share those experiences as teachers would.

At first the students were silent; then they began to talk about the topics of the class in a new and different way. "In a regular class the teacher talks directly with the students, but here we talk between us, and sometimes the teacher is silent. I really learn when I listen to the experiences of others."

I began to reframe my ideas about what it means to be a teacher educator. The comments were positive and invited me to pay attention to how the teacher educator can listen or give voice to students, so that teaching becomes relational. It was stimulating to challenge traditional assumptions about teaching and professional practice.

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As I observed Tom's classes by Skype or video recording and saw what might be possible in a teacher education classroom that is structured differently, I had to identify a way to begin. Realizing the extent to which those learning to teach can be trusted to pursue issues of teaching and learning became the overall theme. Gradually, I introduced more time for them to talk and me to listen, acknowledging that they too have important experiences and explicitly providing time for them to share practicum experiences.

Discussions with a critical friend helped me to understand that each student might respond differently to each new practice.

### ***Tom's New Practices***

After the first three years of collaboration, Tom decided it was time for a formal self-study of his teaching practices in one course and so obtained ethical clearance from the university committee on research ethics. On the first day of the eight-month course, he introduced three new practices: (1) he invited students to consent to be participants in his self-study research, (2) he invited students to replace the familiar terms *theory* and *practice* with *book knowledge* and *craft knowledge*, and (3) he introduced a practice of using the last 15 minutes of each class for discussion of the questions "What did we learn?" and "How did we learn it?" Each of the three proved unexpectedly productive, thanks to close attention and encouragement by Rodrigo. In hindsight, there is important coherence across these three new practices. The self-study of Tom's teaching enabled him to model the analysis of one's teaching, with particular focus on the continuing development of his own craft knowledge. The end-of-class discussions similarly focused on the analysis of teaching and learning for purposes of improvement.

Data analysis focused on patterns in our collaborative conversations and email exchanges leading to advice for others who might attempt comparable collaborative dialogues about changing practices. Table 2 describes Tom's new practices and examples of students' verbatim responses. Each of the four new practices is followed by a statement in italics to summarize his interpretation of the students' responses.

**Table 2**

*Tom's New Practices and the Results*

<b>The Idea</b>	<b>The New Practice</b>	<b>Sample Student Responses</b>
<p>A year-long self- study with a critical friend should guide analysis of new practices.</p>	<p>On the first day of classes, invite students to be participants in their teacher's self-study.</p>	<p>"My reaction was to be extremely impressed that he is studying his teaching." "He is one of the only profs in this program who practices everything he preaches and as a result, I have deeply respected both him and this course from day one."</p>
<p>I was impressed that responses indicated a positive reaction to the idea; I was pleased that they linked it to the importance of their studying their own teaching. The reference to the significance of modeling teaching practices in class seemed particularly important, as teacher educators are so open to being criticized for not practicing what they preach.</p>		
<p>The terms used by Hagger and McIntyre (2006) seem more realistic than the familiar terms of theory and practice.</p>	<p>On the first day of classes, ask students to replace <i>theory</i> and <i>practice</i> with <i>book knowledge</i> and <i>craft knowledge</i> in our discussions of teaching.</p>	<p>"They both represent teachers' essential knowledge; understanding both terms gave me some ideas on what I should aim to learn and how I can learn them." "Understanding Craft Knowledge helped me to transform everyday experience during the practicum into intuitive and reflective learning and thus bring positive changes and stronger results in my performance."</p>
<p>The initial impact seemed positive, as the term craft knowledge seemed intuitively related to practice and required little explanation. Those who chose to write about the use of these two terms at the midpoint of the course spoke positively about them. Written work submitted through the course often used both terms spontaneously.</p>		
<p>Discussion of teaching and learning at the end of the class could provide experience of new ways to explore what students are learning.</p>	<p>Beginning in the first class, introduce the practice of a significant period of discussion at the end of every class.</p>	<p>"The end-of-class discussions (and accompanying exit cards) have been excellent for consolidating my teaching experiences and take-aways from class." "They have allowed me to capture essential Book Knowledge during a discussion or lesson and reflect on Craft Knowledge from my practicum." "The discussions have helped me to recognize different perspectives on learning and thus moved me to deeper levels of reflective practice. The discussions allow me and others a sense of ownership in the class and learning. With that, I feel more engaged in learning."</p>
<p>Students' comments were refreshingly positive; I can now recommend this practice to all teacher educators. Halfway through the course, the students asked if they could generate a list of their own topics for future discussion. Some of the 15-minute discussions continued for an hour or more after the official end of class.</p>		

The inspirations for these three new practices developed over time. The first was inspired in a moment at the 2018 castle conference, the second was inspired by a book,

and the third emerged from a desire to know more about what students were taking from my course and their program. Our discussions after Rodrigo's observations of many classes encouraged me to keep pushing myself; they also helped me to see that there is more coherence across the three new practices than I sensed at the outset. Each contributes in some way to a goal of walking my talk, practicing what I preach, and both modeling and analyzing new practices for those learning to teach,

all with a focus on greater understanding of the process of learning from experience.

### ***Re-Thinking Assumptions about how Students Learn to Teach***

Here we return to the words in our title: Telling is not Teaching, Listening is not Learning. In schools and universities everywhere, lecturing by teachers and listening by students are common. Because teachers' telling is common, it is only too easy for a teacher to assume that students learn when they hear the spoken words of their teacher. Teacher educators face the same challenges: Book knowledge does not easily become craft knowledge, as every teacher candidate quickly realizes in every practicum experience. Myers (2000) described a familiar teacher education approach as one of telling, showing, and guided practice:

Because of my knowledge of my own institution's programs, the programs of professional colleagues at other institutions, and the many programs that I learn about through my national standards work, I believe firmly that the telling, showing, guided-practice approach to teacher education is dominant and well entrenched. (p. 197)

Twenty years later, the underlying assumptions that programs make about learning to teach seem to persist. The reasons are many, and Myers offered a set of 10 questions and answers to describe his own analysis.

Willingham (2009, p. 3), a cognitive scientist, states the first of nine cognitive principles for teachers in these words: "People are naturally curious, but we are not naturally good thinkers; unless the cognitive conditions are right, we will avoid thinking." He elaborated in the following words:

People do not spontaneously examine assumptions that underlie their thinking, try to consider all sides of an issue, question what they know, etc. These things must be modeled for students, and students must be given opportunities to practice— preferably in the context of normal classroom activity. (Willingham, 2007, p. 18)

Two goals for this shared self-study were the identification and examination of our own personal assumptions about learning to teach and the testing of new practices that would shed light on the value of modified assumptions.

Our four years of collaborative critical friendship have seen gradual but significant changes in our thinking and in our actions in classes with teacher candidates. For us, reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) is a slow but essential process. Change involves not only reframing but also "re-practicing"—*risking new practices informed by new perspectives*. Just as our students arrive with complex assumptions about teaching and learning inspired by an apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), so we have had to consider how our own apprenticeships of observation and the cultures of teacher education in which we are immersed have shaped and constrained our assumptions and our actions. Lortie's words apply to us as teacher educators as well as to our students who are learning to teach:

It is improbable that many students learn to see teaching in an ends-means frame or that they normally take an analytic stance toward it. What students learn about teaching is intuitive and imitative rather than explicit and analytical; it is based on individual personalities rather than pedagogical principles. (p. 62)



Our collaborative scrutiny of each other's practices has moved us away from faith in the words that we speak and to which our students listen. We have moved in the direction of more listening to students, with particular attention to their in-program experiences of teacher educators' teaching and their professional learning in our classes and others. We have also given more attention to the many issues associated with learning from experience. We have come to understand that it is more productive to model and analyze teaching in a means-end frame in our classes than to tell, show, and provide guided practice.

## **Trustworthiness**

With each in the role of critical friend to the other, providing guidance in the interpretation of each other's practices and development of new practices, we have contributed to the trustworthiness of the study.

If our overall assessment of a study's trustworthiness is high enough for us to act on it, we are granting the findings a sufficient degree of validity to invest our own time and energy, and to put at risk our reputations as competent investigators. (Mishler, 1990, p. 419)

Shenton (2004) has argued that trustworthiness should be addressed in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This self-study's credibility has been enhanced by using several different data sources and by each providing the perspective of a critical friend for the other.

## **Outcomes**

### ***Critical Friendship***

Much has been written about critical friendship and many have experienced it. Critiquing practices and then identifying and enacting new practices has not always been easy, but we are committed to the concept of mutual critical friendship, freely sharing not only our in-class experiences but also our interpretations of them in the cause of greater value to those who are learning to teach. Potential misunderstandings were avoided through a larger commitment to the processes whereby two teacher educators jointly analyzed their learning from experience. Each helped the other with analysis and justification of the changes in practice, so that *reframing inspired re practicing*. Most changes had supportive literature and were judged as productive by those we were teaching. Our support for each other has been essential as well as productive, teaching us more about the value of self-study methodology and its potential impact on the improvement of teacher education practices. We have also come to see our new practices as celebrations of a reciprocal critical friendship.

### ***Assumptions about Teacher Education Practices***

Our shared discussions and analysis of teacher education practices have transformed the

assumptions we bring to our teaching. Like many other teachers and teacher educators, we began our work as teacher educators by assuming that students learn when the teacher talks and the students listen. By focusing on the issue of learning from experience, we now see that teacher candidates are looking for more than words and that they can be trusted to participate in the development of their professional craft knowledge. What they learn from experience in our classes occurs in new territory with new criteria (Schön, 1995). The positive responses from most of our students are encouraging. Our showing them that we are changing practices models how they can do the same. Reframing leads directly to re-practicing, with its risks and rewards.

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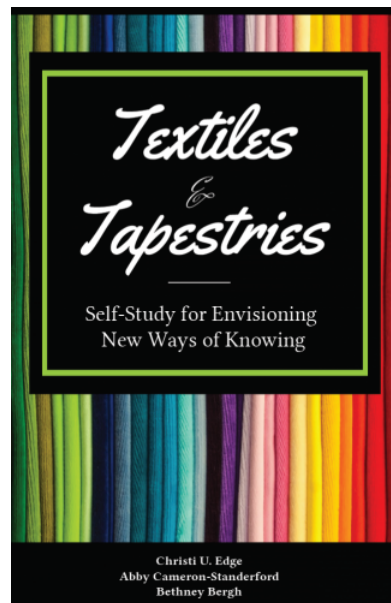
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