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## The making of a teacher: A narrative study of the impact of an extended practicum on preservice teachers

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**THE MAKING OF A TEACHER: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF THE IMPACT  
OF AN EXTENDED PRACTICUM ON PRESERVICE TEACHERS.**

by

Deborah Ingram (Dip. Tch.; B. Ed.)

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the Award of

Master of Education

at the Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University,

Western Australia.

Date of Submission: 2 March, 1998.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The extended practicum is a crucial learning experience for pre-service teachers. This study examines how pre-service teachers learn about teaching within the context of the extended practicum.

Narrative methodology was chosen as an appropriate means to explore and interpret the beliefs and experiences of pre-service teachers for a wider audience while still preserving their voices.

The pre-service teachers and I had a common agenda: to improve the experience of future pre-service teachers on their extended practicum. Our approach to this differed. I wanted to focus on the pre-service teachers' learning about teaching so that future pre-service teachers could improve their learning. The pre-service teachers' narratives focused on other factors which were impacting on them so that the Faculty of Education could improve their programme. Both sets of factors have been included.

The key themes which emerged, learning from critical incidents, the impact of the assessment and the baggage we carry, have been amplified through the narratives of the pre-service teachers.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1. incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
2. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
3. contain any defamatory material.



Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 14th May, 1998.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

This study is about the impact of practicum experience on preservice teachers, referred to also as student teachers. More specifically, the study is about the impact of an extended practicum programme, the Assistant Teacher Programme, on five student teachers in their final year of their teacher education course at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia.

I was first directly involved in working with student teachers when supervising primary student teachers from Edith Cowan University on their Assistant Teacher Programme in 1995. I have also been a member of the Confirmatory Panel, visiting and assessing student teachers who were nominated for a grade of Outstanding. During this supervisory period I was intrigued by the changes in the student teachers and I wondered what contributed to these changes. My continued interest in the student teachers' experiences and the changes they underwent led to my decision to undertake research in this area. In 1996, as a part of my course work for my Master of Education, I worked with a class of third year student teachers as they prepared for the ATP. I also met with three of the student teachers over the period of their ATP to follow their experience.

Students enrolled in the final year of the three year Bachelor of Arts (Education) course at Edith Cowan University have experienced a two week practicum in each semester of the first two years of their study. In the third year of the B. A. (Educ.) course, students are placed in a classroom for an extended practicum of one term of ten weeks. This extended practicum is called the Assistant Teacher Programme (known locally as 'the ATP'). In the term immediately prior to the ATP, student teachers participate in the unit EDU3500 Education 5. The aim of this unit is to prepare the student teachers for the ATP. Modules covered in this

unit include professionalism, planning and programming, record keeping and improving teaching skills.

In his introduction to the *Assistant Teacher Programme 1997 Guidelines for principals, teachers, assistant teachers*, Bernard Harrison, Dean of the Faculty of Education, states that “the ATP is recognised as a crucial aspect of the student teacher’s preparation, and competent performance on ATP is a requirement for graduation” (Edith Cowan University, 1997, p. 1). The ATP is a consequential experience for student teachers. As well as the final teaching mark being critical for the student teacher’s future employment prospects, extended practicum experience is significant for learning to teach (Loughran, 1996, p. 55).

Descriptions of the differences between novices and experts can be found in recent accounts of the shift from novice to expert, but how these differences have occurred has not been examined (Desforges, 1995, p. 385). Little is known about how particular experiences as a student teacher contribute to the construction of knowledge about teaching by the student teacher (Jones & Vesilind, 1996, p. 92). Student teacher perspectives have been undervalued and under-researched (Kettle & Sellars, 1993) yet we need to know the student teachers’ perspectives to:

- understand their development;
- improve professional practice experience and supervision;
- improve the student teacher’s classroom practice;
- reform teacher education curricula; and
- find out what would be most helpful and supportive to student teachers.

This study set out to trace and describe five student teachers’ experience of their ATP with a view to interpreting this for a wider audience while still preserving the student teachers’

voices. The main purpose was to provide a resource whereby future student teachers could gain insight into the experience of being a student teacher on ATP and the ways in which these experiences impacted on the student teacher's practical theory of teaching. A secondary purpose was to provide the Faculty of Education with information so that the ATP, could be improved for the benefit of future student teachers' learning about teaching.

Choosing a methodology in which to conduct this study raised interesting issues. How can one know what is going on inside a student teacher's head? My reading pointed to the growing interest in and use of stories and narratives to explore a teacher's beliefs and experiences. My previous research had been predominantly in the empirical, quantitative mode yet narrative continued to grow in appeal as an appropriate method to use for this particular study.

The study is divided into seven chapters which seek to integrate the development of my thinking with the research study itself. In chapter two, I dialogue with the theoretical perspectives informing the study. I discuss the current research into the learning of student teachers, including the role of, the development of and changes in the practical theory of student teachers. As I explore my understanding of narrative, why narrative has arisen as a research methodology, what narrative is and how narrative is situated as a research methodology, I reflect on the interaction of the learning of student teachers with the use of narrative research.

Chapter three describes the study and the various issues that arose as a result of using narrative research, including the shifting focus of the study and unexpected ethical dilemmas and conflicts for myself as a researcher.

The narratives are presented in chapters four, five and six. Chapter four, *Learning about teaching*, looks at the encounter of three of the participants with unusual situations which they had not anticipated. *The impact of the assessment*, chapter five, reveals the impact of the

assessment process on the learning of the participants. In chapter six, *The baggage we carry*, the impact of the past experiences of one of the participants is revealed along with some of my own struggles as a researcher with aspects of his story.

Three key factors, critical incidents, assessment, and personal baggage were identified as impacting on the learning and experience of the participants on their extended practicum. In chapter seven, these findings are discussed along with reflections on the use of narrative as a research methodology. My final comment, an open letter to pre-service teachers, is given in the epilogue.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **DIALOGUE WITH THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

In the landscape of teacher education, student teachers live in the transition zone between the environment of the university, as represented to them by the Faculty of Education, and the environment of the school, as experienced in the classroom. The environment of the university is generally characterised as one of inquiry and questioning, an environment in which the academics produce and explore the knowledge bases of their disciplines. The environment of the classroom is characterised by action and interaction. The teacher may be guided by reflection and informed decision making in preparing for the day's lessons, but in the classroom the teacher faces a situation which is far less under control. Decisions must be made on the spot, action is required immediately (Beckett, 1996, p. 135). Academics have generally characterised this distinction in terms of theory and practice, seeing their own role as facilitating the acquisition of knowledge while student teachers learn their practice in fieldwork or professional practice (Fulcher, 1996, pp. 167 - 8).

#### **Reflection and practical theory**

Concerns about the theory practice gap have led to an increasing interest in reflection within teacher education and beyond (see Platzer, Snelling & Blake, 1997; Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990). Teachers who reflect on their practice, along with other professionals, are involved in a conscious interaction with a problematic situation. Most behavioural competencies can be taught to student teachers with one exception: the ability to act appropriately (Richardson, 1990). Making judgements, assessing a situation and having some experience with situations are all necessary if one is to act appropriately. Reflective practice promotes the ability to act appropriately and helps meet the recommendation of

Dewey (1904/5, in Valli, 1990) "that education programmes should produce students of teaching who are thoughtful about educational theory and principles rather than skilled in the routine, mere technicians and 'copiers, followers of tradition and example'." (p. 39).

Reflective practice is considered to improve teaching (Vaughan, 1990). By being reflective, teachers examine and make clear what they believe and so they can change, and thus improve, their teaching practice.

Reflection involves a person in actively questioning and accepting or rejecting what is experienced or communicated, linking the new information with their prior knowledge and generating new understandings and knowledge as a result. Effective learning is the result of the person actively constructing their own personal world view of reality. Yet teachers, like most humans, will tend to close down rather than open up to the possibility of restructuring their beliefs (Desforges, 1995, p. 389). As Handal and Lauvas (1987) present the dilemma "some fishermen are said to have twenty years experience: others have only one year experienced twenty times. The latter have never reflected on their practice to actually learn from it" (p. 11). The lecturing staff at Edith Cowan University require student teachers enrolled in EDU3500, the preparatory unit for the ATP, to submit a copy of their 'belief system' including their educational aims, their current beliefs about teaching and learning, their repertoire of teaching strategies, how they plan to cater for individual differences, and their approach to classroom management, teacher-student relationships, evaluation and self evaluation. By attempting to make student teachers be explicit about their belief systems, lecturing staff recognise that student teachers, as well as teachers, have practical theories which direct their behaviour (Handal & Lauvas, 1987, p. 9).

### **Practical theories of teaching**

Personal experience, common sense and common practice are thought by many to be the means by which teachers teach (Fang, 1996, p. 51). There is, however, substantive evidence

to the contrary. Teachers hold theories about teaching which influence their practice (Fang, 1996, p. 51). What teachers believe and think directs their behaviour (Alarcao & Moreira, 1993, p. 183; Zeichner & Liston, 1987, p. 24). Handal and Lauvas (1987) propounded the thesis that “every teacher possesses a ‘practical theory’ of teaching which is subjectively the strongest determining factor in her educational practice” ( p. 9). Fang (1996) cites Brophy and Good (1974) as stating “that a better understanding of [a] teacher’s belief system ... will significantly contribute to enhancing educational effectiveness”(p. 60).

### **What is a practical theory?**

Handal and Lauvas (1987) define practical theory as “a person’s private, integrated but ever-changing system of knowledge, experience and values which is relevant to teaching practice at any particular time” ( p. 9). The practical theory has three components:

- personal experience;
- knowledge and experience transmitted from others; and
- personal values and ideals.

Each of these components are intimately interwoven and impossible to separate. Each component influences and is influenced by the other components. A different weighting and level of importance is carried by each component. Of the three components, Handal and Lauvas (1987) consider ‘values’ as having the strongest influence. A person can be stronger or weaker in a particular component. An example would be a student teacher who may have a strong knowledge about teaching transmitted from others, but little practical experience of teaching.

Other terms in the literature similar to practical theory are educational platform (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1979); knowing-in-action (Schon, 1983); schema (Bullough & Knowles, 1991);

practical philosophy of teaching (Goodman, 1988) and theory-of-action (Marland & Osborne, 1990). My preferred definition is that of Handal and Lauvas (1987) because of the greater comprehensiveness of their definition and the explicit statement of the key elements.

### **The development of student teachers' practical theories**

Incorporating "the existential experiences of the participants themselves (i.e., their language, actions, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions)", researchers have described the development of student teachers' practical theories over an extended period of time noting the active role of the student in this development (Goodman, 1988, p. 122); the contribution of reflective thinking particularly in the context of peer reflection groups (Kettle & Sellars, 1993, p. 36); and the detrimental impact of the assessment based context of the practicum on "the trialing of ideas considered central to an individual's practical theory" (Kettle & Sellars, 1993, p. 36).

Part of becoming a professional is moving beyond the substitution of experience for theory to a process of fusing both theory and experience. Student teachers approach teaching with high ideals and expectations which, when exposed to the reality of classroom life, often quickly collapse. Cole and Knowles (1993, p. 459) contend that student teachers arrive at teaching with an idealised picture of what it means to be a teacher and of what teaching is about. The reality of classroom life shatters this image. This 'reality shock' is further complicated by the gap student teachers perceive between the theory they have learned and their actual performance in the classroom (Bromme & Tillema, 1995, p. 261).

Experience with students can be a significant catalyst for change. Jones and Vesilind (1996) identified the midpoint of the student teacher's extended practicum as a time when significant reconstruction of the student teacher's knowledge about teaching occurs, changes attributed by the student teachers to their experiences with students. The student teachers interviewed by Jones and Vesilind, on assuming the full teaching load during their extended practicum,

were faced with students responding in unexpected ways to their instruction. Such anomalies provided a powerful basis for learning about teaching by the student teachers.

Other researchers have found that exposure to experience in the classroom is just as likely to lead to little restructuring occurring in a student teacher's practical theory as it is to the deep analysis which leads to the forging of new beliefs (Beach & Pearson, 1996, p. 11; Desforges, 1995, p. 389). A dilemma can develop for the student teacher when conflicts or tensions arise. A number of conflicts experienced by student teachers have been identified, along with variations in the willingness of student teachers to acknowledge and to learn from such conflict (Beach & Pearson, 1996, p. 11). Beach and Pearson found that if the student teacher perceived that acknowledging conflict or tension would negatively affect their assessment, they were more likely to avoid acknowledging the problem and therefore avoid the reflection and questioning which would lead to necessary changes in their practical theory.

### **How does a teacher's practical theory change?**

Despite the importance of teacher's practical theories to the process of teaching, little attention has been given to how changes in the practical theories of teachers occur or the consequences of these changes. While Kettle and Sellars (1993) characterise the practical theory as "being both highly individualised and susceptible to change" (p. 1), others characterise the practical theory as difficult to change (see, for example, Cole & Knowles, 1993; Bromme & Tillema, 1995). While I accede that the practical theory is highly individualised, I agree with Desforges (1995, p. 391) who argues that teachers are likely to minimise unexpected observations by ignoring or absorbing them rather than restructuring their beliefs. Rather than encouraging a restructuring of the practical theory, in my experience working with student teachers, the practicum seems to be a socialising experience encouraging student teachers to conform to the norm of the classroom and the school, to maintain the status quo, rather than

to question and challenge current practice (see also Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981, p. 9). Considerable effort is needed to create the possibility of restructuring beliefs in the light of experience (see Appendix 1 for *A model of cognitive restructuring resulting from experience*). In the case of the student teacher, the classroom situation, the assessment based nature of the practicum and the interaction with the supervising teacher and the university supervisor are variables which can also impact on the cycle of restructuring (Martinez, 1992, p. 60; Kettle & Sellars, 1993, p. 32, 36).

People actively and continuously construct their own knowledge on the basis of experience and prior knowledge (Biggs & Moore, 1993, p. 22). The cognitive schemes developed are modified through interaction with the social and natural environments which influences the way things are looked at as much as *what* is looked at. Polkinghorne (1988) views experience as “enveloped in a personal and cultural realm of non-material meanings and thoughts” (p. 15). Using Polkinghorne’s construction, we can expect student teachers to make sense of their personal world by mediating their response to the practicum by deliberating. Previous experience is retrieved and the relationship between actions and consequences are explored as a variety of scenarios are created imaginatively in order to anticipate the outcomes of actions and make decisions about what to do. In choosing how to deal with a classroom management problem, a reflective teacher will draw on previous experience to explore, imaginatively, a variety of possible solutions to anticipate possible outcomes before making a decision on the action to be taken.

According to Polkinghorne, we should also expect student teachers, through language, to exchange personal thoughts and experiences. The thoughts and experiences of others are incorporated into the personal cognitive schemes of the student teacher and so inform the deliberating process. Constructing knowledge involves constructing meaning and meaning is filtered through perception as well as action. A forestry worker, a miner and an environmentalist would be likely to construct different knowledge and gain different

meanings from reading the same brochure outlining government policy on the old growth forests.

Student teachers, in trying to make sense of their classroom experiences on practicum, focus on specific events and shape them as stories (Carter, 1993). This process, captured over the period of the ATP, gave insight into what the student teachers in my study were experiencing and how this changed over time. Mattingly (1991) observes:

Stories point towards deep beliefs and assumptions that people often cannot tell in propositional or denotive form, the “practical theories” and deeply held images that guide their actions ... Actors may not be able to present their practical theories ... propositionally or may offer explanatory theories that do not seem to reflect the assumptions actually influencing their action. But they can always tell stories about what they have done and what has happened to them, and others, as a result. (p. 236)

Because I agree that the stories people tell do point towards their deep beliefs and assumptions, the images that guide them, the practical theories behind all that they do, narrative became the natural way to convey my own research. Narratives, in ordering human actions and individual events into a comprehensible whole, aid the registering of relationships from which meaning is gained. The significance of particular actions and events can be evaluated in relation to the whole. Because events and actions are framed within the context of human motives and desires and limited by both time and environment, narratives make human action explainable. The significance of events is clarified in relation to the outcome. Meaning is generated.

## **Using narrative as a way of researching**

The purpose of this section is to explain narrative so that the reader can understand the meaning of narrative which I have reached and why I have used narrative for this particular piece of research.

### **What is a narrative?**

The Macquarie dictionary defines a narrative in the first instance as a “story of events, experiences or the like, whether true or fictitious” (Delbridge, Bernard, Blair, Peters & Butler, 1991, p. 1183). In the same volume, a story is found to have a number of elements. A story can be true or fictitious and involves a plot or succession of incidents which are reported as a tale, an account or a history which has an interest or entertainment value for those who hear or read the account. While literary theorists would make distinctions between story and narrative, for the present purpose I understand the two terms to refer to a similar construct (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, p. 259). To further clarify the meaning of narrative, I examine other properties of narratives.

### **Narrative as structure**

Structuralist theory, in which each narrative is seen as having two parts, a story and a discourse (Chatman, 1978, p. 19), provided what I consider to be a minimum structure for narrative. The story provides the content of actions and events as well as characters and setting while the discourse provides the expression or the means of communication. This basic structure is further elaborated by Piaget (quoted in Chatman, 1978, p. 20 -22), who identified three key aspects of narrative structure:

- wholeness - a sequential and organised structure;



- transformation - an element of the deep structure reflected in how the story is put together and whether changes in events, characters and setting are made to preserve the whole;
- self-regulation - a self-contained structure which maintains and closes itself.

Other features traditionally considered important to narrative included plot, character, setting, point of view, narrative voice, interior monologue, stream of consciousness and narratee or reader (Chatman, 1978, p. 263).

A narrative is also defined as “the symbolic presentation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time” (Scholes, 1981, p. 205). Events have already occurred and the subject matter is related as it is connected in time. Certain events are selected by the narrator and are put together in a particular shape with a particular audience in mind. A very specific syntactic shape, such as that of beginning - middle - end, or situation - transformation - situation, is adopted.

The ATP provided a natural structure for my own narrative accounts of the student teachers' experiences. There was a definite beginning, middle and end, a common subject matter, as well as a natural sequence of time. There were characters, the participants themselves, their supervising teachers and their university supervisors, while other staff members at the school as well as students had a role. There was a setting, the school and class placement of each student teacher. The point of view chosen was that of the student teacher. Other points of view could have been included, but my specific interest was the point of view of the student teachers, so, for better or for worse, the point of view of the other characters in the story are not heard. The narrator's voice is in the story, but shifts as the multiple selves of the narrator emerge.

I am aware that “contemporary texts challenge traditional notions of narrative causality” (Chatman, 1978, p. 263). In literature, more recent narratives are challenging the notions of order, temporality and structure. In a similar way, I believe that narrative research challenges

the traditional notions of what research is. Narrative research draws on the postmodern position which denies certainty and objectivity. While qualitative research acknowledges as legitimate the affect of the researcher, narrative research not only acknowledges the role and voice of the researcher / narrator, but almost insists on them being foregrounded. I think that there is a potential danger in moving away from recognisable forms and structures that, as with some forms of more recent literature, will go "on and on until it means anything and everything" (Hoban, 1976, quoted in Packwood & Sikes, 1996, p. 336). I do not find such a position helpful for contributing to knowledge and improving practice. As a Masters student, I also recognise my vulnerability in choosing to use a form of research which differs from the "monologic authorial texts" of traditional forms (Packwood & Sikes, 1996, p. 336). While I am prepared to challenge the certainty and objectivity of what we call research, I am not yet prepared to challenge the forms in which my thesis could be submitted. Maintaining an acceptable structure within the narratives is important for me in providing a form which makes the thesis accessible to potential readers while at the same time allowing me to carry out research which is both personally and academically meaningful.

### **Narrative as construction**

Narrators, consciously or unconsciously, construct a version of events that reflects their version of reality, their representation of the world (Mitchell, 1981). Some events are accentuated while others are omitted or minimised. So, for example, some are chosen to highlight the persecution of the protagonist while others are chosen to minimise the protagonist's role in bringing on the persecution, some are slanted to evoke pity or admiration while others are glossed over for fear of revealing the protagonist in an unfavourable light (Schafer, 1981).

Mattingly (1991) observes "One could say that in stories the storyteller is always implicitly answering the question 'Who is to blame here?'" (p. 256). While narratives are concerned

with action, a focal point of a narrative is the motives and intentions of the characters portrayed and their role in the events that occur and the final outcome. A narrative is an investigation of events - action, conflict, drama - as they occur.

In choosing from the many stories and incidents shared by the participants, I was forced to choose some events over others, to highlight those incidents and events which were, to me, the narratives that opened the windows into the student teachers' experiences. To some extent I ask the question 'Who is to blame here?' while remaining conscious that I have heard only one side of the story. At times I have been appalled at the sadness or injustice in the student teachers' narratives. I have sat and listened to their unfolding narratives, finding it difficult to believe, wondering how much their construction of their narratives reflects an attempt to protect their own self-worth in trying to make sense of their experience. I wanted to hear the voices of the other characters. I wanted to observe the student teachers in their classrooms with my own eyes and make my own judgement. Yet I had chosen to limit myself to their narratives, to see this practicum through their eyes alone. In constructing my representation of their world, I have attempted to reflect my participants' version of their reality.

### **Narrative as communicating meaning**

Telling stories is a basic way of representing action (Bruner, 1986; Ricoeur, 1981, 1984) and they are told for many reasons: "to entertain, to gossip, as evidence for our arguments, to reveal who we are" (Mattingly, 1991, p. 235). Narratives assume two parties, a narrator and a narratee (Chatman, 1978). The narrator constructs a story that usually has an evocative element that draws the narratee in, so that the narratee identifies with the protagonist of the story and so experiences something of the situation that the protagonist experiences. In constructing my narratives, my intention was to open a window on the experience of being a student teacher, to so construct my narrative that you, the reader, would identify with the participants and so gain an understanding of what they know from their experience.

Narratives help solve the problem of communicating what one knows. As White (1981) observes:

We may not be able fully to comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty *understanding* a story coming from another culture ... far from being one code among many that a culture may utilise for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about shared reality can be transmitted.” (p. 1 - 2).

The narrator, in constructing the story, seeks to communicate meaning while the narratee, in interpreting the story, gains meaning (Carter, 1993), but both narrator and narratee bring their own experience and knowledge, their own baggage, to their writing and reading of the narrative.

Narratives are “characterised by an intrinsic multiplicity of meanings” (Carter, 1993, p. 6). and have more information than can readily be gained from one reading. Consequently the knowledge implicit in narratives cannot be reduced to a general rule, law or proposition (Martin, 1986). The multiplicity of meanings, and hence interpretations, characteristic of narrative resist a single scientific explanation.

Bruner (1986) states “ language is our most powerful tool for organising experience, and indeed, for constituting ‘realities’,” (p. 8). Telling stories helps to make sense of experiences. As Mattingly (1991) observes “One motive for telling stories is to wrest meaning from experiences, especially powerful or disturbing ones” (p. 237). Narratives capture the ambiguity and dilemma of situations as well as the complex and unpredictable influences and intentions of the participants in the story (Carter, 1993).

The ATP is an experience which ‘hangs over the heads’ of student teachers from the beginning of their teacher education. For the five student teachers in this study, the ATP was a powerful and sometimes disturbing experience. Telling their stories gave meaning to their

experiences even if it was only for the sake of “getting something done to fix it up” (‘Christina’, personal communication, November 30, 1997).

### **The political nature of narrative**

Narrative “dares to announce ‘I am’ (‘we are’) and in so doing deliberately defies the forces of alienation, anomie, annihilation, authoritarianism, fragmentation, commodification, depreciation, and dispossession” that have arisen as a result of the growing disillusionment with the Modern world (Casey, 1995, p. 213). Casey (1995, p. 216) claims that, in an increasingly mechanistic age, narrative celebrates ordinary people’s actions by putting “shards of experience together, to (re)construct identity, community, and tradition”. Turner (1981) also echoes this thought. Narratives:

endeavour to rearticulate a social group broken by sectional or self-serving interests ... [Narrative] attempts to rearticulate opposing values and goals in a meaningful structure ... remaking cultural sense, even when they seem to be dismantling ancient edifices of meaning that can no longer redress our modern “dramas of living”. (Turner, 1981, p. 164)

Narratives enable the telling of stories by which a culture comes to know itself and by which it is able to make itself known to others.

Narratives have political agendas. Mattingly (1991) observes that “the kinds of issues that are the stuff of stories - actions, accidents, alliances, and enemies - [are] particularly dangerous material in an institutional climate governed by a high level of delicate international politics” (p. 256). White (1981) views narrative as supporting “orthodox and politically conservative social conditions’ (Mitchell, 1981, p. viii), whereas Turner (1981), while recognising that narrative opposes disorder and chaos, also recognises narrative as “a way of bringing on disintegration and indeterminacy in the interests of unpredictable transformations in a culture” (Mitchell, 1981, p. viii). The Popular Memory Group (1982) recognise the

importance of “a popular memory that is socialist, feminist and anti-racist as one element in a strong popular socialist culture. It is one means by which an organic social group ... becomes capable of a wider transformative role in the society” (p. 214). Casey (1995) also recognises the connection of narrative research projects with political projects, citing examples of the use of narratives at a personal level to address the “existential, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic apprehensions about the self [arising] from the alienation produced by social institutions” (p. 219) and at a collective level when the stories of subordinated people become a part of an overall strategy to gain political ground (p. 220).

The political nature of narrative raises important questions. As Casey (1995) observes “what is at stake is a fundamental reconstruction of the relationship between the researcher and the subject of the research” (p. 231). How will the researcher treat the narratives of those they interview: “as subjects creating their own history [or] as objects of research?” (p. 232)? What relationship will the researcher have with the participants: acquaintanceship or friendship? How will the researcher deal with the researcher’s own subjectivity: by bringing in, or by excluding, the personal in their research? The writing of the narrative itself becomes a political act. As Nespor and Barber (1995) experience “composing *with* the people who are part of your research - seeing them as co-authors and part of the audience for the text - is different from writing *about* them for other audiences” (p. 49). The audience chosen shapes the text and “situates the texts politically” (Nespor & Barber, 1995, p. 49). Researchers must choose between aligning themselves with their own social network, “the more academic or intellectual elements in the professional middle class” (Popular Memory Group, 1982, p. 250) or becoming a companion to “the social groups previously marginalized and treated as sources of data” (Nespor & Barber, 1995, p. 49). I found, as I listened to the stories my participants shared with me, that, although my intended audience had been future student teachers entering their ATP, my participants were sharing stories that they wanted communicated to the Practicum Department and the Faculty of Education.

As the research took on a life of its own, I was forced to choose between aligning myself with the traditional network of researchers and academics and answering the neat research questions I had started out with or aligning myself with my sources of data, the student teachers, and telling the story they wanted to have heard. By shifting my intended primary audience from other student teachers to the Faculty of Education and by attempting to tell what was important to the student teachers, I aligned myself politically with the student teachers. At the same time I recognised that, because I was not a student teacher, I could never truly represent them and the fact that I felt I could make only limited demands of time on my interviewees meant that the narratives were my construction rather than a collaborative effort.

As one person stated, I had, with this research, entered “a political minefield” (personal communication, July 7, 1997), a comment I found interesting given my growing perception of the political nature of narrative. In choosing to research only the student teacher’s perspectives of their ATP, I had chosen to give voice to those in the teacher education practicum who were “clearly located at the bottom end of all power relations in which they are involved” (Martinez, 1997, p. 9). The kinds of issues that were the stuff of their stories was dangerous material in the institutional climate of the schools in which their stories were set, a factor I became aware of when some participants commented on being reassured by the confidentiality of the study.

### **Narrative as a different way of knowing**

Currently, the emphasis in research into what teachers think has been moving into qualitative, interpretative methodologies (Bennett, Wood, & Rogers, 1996, p. 4; Beattie, 1995, p. 65; Fang, 1996, p. 60). Such studies seek to produce a quality portrait of human action and experience in context. Within the interpretive framework, stories and narratives are emerging as forms which provide “different kinds of knowledge and different ways to represent it

[with] the potential to bring new meaning to teacher education and to the continuous experiences of change, of growth and of professional development in a teacher's life" (Beattie, 1995, p. 65). Cathro (1995) writes:

use of narrative as a way of researching (collecting and interpreting the meanings of self and others) and writing (communicating that research to others) has not traditionally been accepted in academe. Although narrative has been commonly used as anecdote to support findings, narrative has not been used as the heart, the centre, of the research process (p.53).

Some researchers view narrative as an effective way to present rich data or as a method to communicate a point about the work of teachers, while others view narrative as a different mode of knowing that is contextualized and full of meaning (Bennett, Wood, & Rogers, 1996).

I find Bruner helpful in explaining the fundamental difference between narrative and the more traditional ways of knowing. Bruner (1986) argues that:

There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two (though complementary) are irreducible to one another. Efforts to reduce one mode to the other or to ignore one at the expense of the other inevitably fail to capture the rich diversity of thought. Each of the ways of knowing, moreover, has operating principles of its own and its own criteria of well-formedness. (p. 11)

The two modes Bruner (1986) proposes are the paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode and the narrative mode. The paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode, by using "good theory, tight analysis, logical proof, sound argument, and empirical discovery guided by reasoned hypothesis" (p. 13) seeks to establish truth by moving from the particular to the universal. A world is constructed in which the facts are believable because they are testable. In contrast, the narrative mode, by using "good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not



necessarily “true”) historical accounts” (p. 13), seeks to establish verisimilitude or lifelikeness by exploring the particular. A world is constructed in which facts are believed because the experiences and psychic realities of the protagonists are lifelike. Each mode shapes our cognitive schemes in a different way.

To me, narrative has a structure. Narratives are constructed in a particular way by their narrator in order to convey a particular meaning to an audience who derive their own meaning from the narrative. Narratives have a political aspect. They are often associated with giving voice to the oppressed or to the less powerful. Narrative research presents ethical dilemmas to the researcher, especially in relation to one’s own subjectivity. Narrative is a different, but equally valid, way of knowing to the more traditional forms of knowing.

For me, what I hoped to accomplish with my study determined my choice of narrative as a method. Because I was interested in how student teachers learn about teaching on an extended practicum and how the extended practicum impacts on their practical theory about teaching, I needed to ‘get inside the student teachers’ heads’, to find some way to explore their beliefs and their understanding of their experiences. I assume, along with many researchers of teachers’ knowledge, that the student teachers’ words would represent their beliefs, as well as their thoughts and feelings about their experiences (see, for example, Freeman, 1996, p. 734; Marland & Osborne, 1990, p. 94; Clark & Peterson, 1986, pp. 259 - 260). The student teachers’ narratives are the student teachers’ own interpretation of events within their particular context. Their narratives would help me to discover their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences (Jalongo, Isenberg & Gerbracht, 1995, p. 77). By using narrative research, I would be able to use the narratives of student teachers to communicate a more holistic picture of their experience on an extended practicum.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE STUDY

A writer has been described as “someone sitting on the top of a brick wall describing to someone below the action on the other side” ( Bentley, 1946, cited in Zeller, 1995, p. 75). In this study, I sat on the other side of the desk listening to student teachers tell me their narratives in order to make sense of them for my readers. A simplistic or superficial report of their narratives would not have done justice to their experiences or to narrative research. I had to examine the hows and whys and why nots of their experiences in order to construct narratives that would help the reader understand ‘the action on the other side’.

In this study I wanted to learn about the impact of an extended practicum programme, the Assistant Teacher Programme, on five student teachers in their final year of their teacher education course. I wanted to know about the experiences of the student teachers and the changes they underwent as a result of their extended practicum. My main purpose was to give future student teachers an insight into the experience of being a student teacher on an extended practicum and the ways in which these experiences impacted on the practical theory of student teachers.

The research questions initially guiding my study were:

- How do student teachers learn about teaching on their extended practicum, the Assistant Teacher Programme, locally known as the ATP?
- In what ways does the ATP impact on the practical theory of students?
- How does a student teacher’s experience and interpretation of critical incidents in their ATP impact on their practical theory of teaching?

- To what factors do student teachers attribute changes in their practical theory?

In previous study I had developed a model of cognitive restructuring resulting from experience. This provided a framework for me as I entered the study (see Appendix 1: *A model of cognitive restructuring resulting from experience* ).

Perhaps the questions reflected my empirical, quantitative background. I wanted to know the impact of the ATP on student teachers generally, but thought I had to have neat, specific, analytical questions so had focused more specifically on the practical theory of the student teachers. Perhaps they reflected my inexperience with narrative methodology. I had been warned that this type of research takes on a life of its own and that held true for this study.

In the permission letter giving student teachers information about the study, the emphasis was on the expectations and experience of the student teachers rather than on the shift in their thinking about teaching. Unintentionally, but perhaps more accurately, this had reflected my underlying interest. I had wanted my research to be a study which reflected what was important to the student teachers rather than an investigator driven exercise, reflecting what I thought was important. Because I had not wanted to impose a structure on the interviews which would suppress the stories of the student teachers, I had decided to begin each interview with an open ended question which I thought would elicit what was having the most impact on the student teachers at the time of the interview. For the first interview after the ATP had started (interview 2) I opened with "Tell me about your first week". In interview 3, I had a chance to ask some of the participants "How's it all going?", but generally they were already starting to tell me their story and needed no prompting. By interview 4, I was hard pressed to get the recording equipment turned on in time to get their initial statements. They were 'bursting' to tell me their stories. Unfortunately for my research questions, the student teachers' stories were not convenient cameos of how critical incidents in their classroom teaching experience had impacted on what they thought about teaching.

Instead they were windows into what it was really like to be a student teacher on an extended practicum. While the student teachers answered my questions about what they were learning about teaching and learning, I was very aware that the stories the student teachers wanted to tell were opening up other important aspects of their experience of the ATP. While there were incidents which did lend themselves to answering my initial research questions, I found myself in a dilemma. I could keep the emphasis on the changes in their practical theories about teaching or I could shift the emphasis to what the student teachers viewed as the most important aspects of their experience of ATP.

To describe 'the action on the other side' through the one lens of 'changes in their practical theories about teaching' seemed to unnecessarily limit what could be learned from the broader landscape of the experiences of the student teachers. Such an approach might answer my research questions but would not do justice to the experiences of the student teachers or to narrative research. I also realised that when I was retelling the stories of the student teachers to others interested in my research, I was telling stories about the experiences of the student teachers, the pressures, challenges and conflicts they faced, the contrasts in their experiences, and my own reactions and struggles as I conducted their research. Such themes carried greater importance to me for communicating to others the impact of the ATP. The implications for the impact of the ATP on the practical theories about teaching of the student teachers were present but had ceased to be the organising framework.

## **The method**

### **The participants**

Five student teachers from the third year of the Bachelor of Arts (Educ.) course at Edith Cowan University, two males and three females, were asked to participate in the study.

Rather than focus on the experiences of student teachers in a similar placement, I had wanted

to gain a broader perspective and so I wanted to have student teachers who had been allocated to private and government schools, covering different socio-economic areas and year levels. The student teachers were suggested by the lecturer responsible for EDU3500 Education 5, the preparatory unit for the ATP. Because of a number of factors beyond my control, student teachers were experiencing considerable stress and those chosen were selected on the basis that they would be able to cope with the perceived added pressure of participating in a research study. Positively, I was able to offer the student teachers the opportunity to explore their ATP experience with someone who knew the ATP, who knew what it was like to be a student as well as a teacher, and who would not be assessing them in any way.

Three student teachers had work experience before entering the teacher education programme. Two student teachers had entered the programme straight from school. One student teacher was over forty years old. The remaining student teachers were in their early twenties. Two student teachers were in different Catholic primary schools while the remaining three students were in two government primary schools. One government school was in a middle to high socio-economic area, the other government school was a Priority Schools Programme (PSP) school.<sup>1</sup> Two student teachers had been allocated to a year 1 class. The other student teachers had been allocated to year 2, year 3 and year 4 classes.

The process of thinking about and answering the questions asked in the interview was expected to encourage the participants to be more reflective and articulate about their practical

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<sup>1</sup> The Priority School Programme (PSP) is the WA terminology for the Commonwealth Disadvantaged Schools Programme. Teachers in PSP schools are faced with challenging situations. Within PSP schools, Commonwealth money is frequently spent on staffing in a wide range of areas which support the regular teaching staff, children, families and curriculum. Social workers, Aboriginal Education Workers, and parenting programmes are examples of some of the support provided in these schools.

theory. As reflective thinking is an aspect of teacher education promoted by the Faculty of Education at Edith Cowan University as well as by teacher educators worldwide (Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990) this direction was expected to have a positive impact on the participants' field experience.

### **The interviews**

The teaching load of student teachers in the ATP is graded so that by week 3/4, after a gradual start, student teachers assumed fifty percent of the teaching load, by week 5/6/7 seventy five percent of the teaching load and by the final weeks the major responsibility for the class (see figure 1).

In order to track the changes or development of the practical theory of the student teachers over the ten weeks of the ATP, I conducted four interviews (see figure 1 for the interview schedule). Because changes are thought to occur mid-way through extended field placements an interview was included at that point (Jones & Vesilind, 1996, p. 113). My previous experience working with student teachers also pointed to important changes occurring during that time.

**Figure 1. Interview schedule**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>School term</b>	<b>Timing of interviews</b>
April	7	Last week of academic term	Interview 1 (John, Christina, Celine)
	14	School vacation	Interview 1 (Jodie)
	21	School vacation/student exams	Interview 1 (Craig)
	28	First week of ATP	
May	5		Interview 2 (All students except Christina)
	12		
	19	50% teaching load	
	26		Interview 3 (John, Craig)
June	2		Interview 3 (Jodie, Celine, Christina)
	9	75% teaching load	
	16		
	23	Major responsibility for the class, c 100% teaching load	
	30	Last week of ATP	
July	7	School vacation	Interview 4 (All students)

The approach I took to the interviewing drew strongly from the field of oral history. Oral history involves the tape recording of interviews:

- conducted in question and answer format;
- by an interviewer who has some appreciation of the subject to be discussed;
- of a knowledgeable interviewee who knows their comments are being recorded and who has agreed to make the information they give available for research purposes;
- of historical interest;
- accessible to a range of researchers.

(Baum, quoted in Douglas, Roberts & Thompson, 1988, p. 2)

While the tapes of my participants were not intended to be accessible to other researchers, they were “a pool of raw material for ... interpretation” and as such I thought the theoretical standpoint of oral historians would best inform my interviewing technique (Douglas, Roberts & Thompson, 1988, p. 3).

Like oral historians, I needed to be aware of my role and influence in the interviewing process. Interviewers can guide the interview to topics relevant to the subject to be discussed and can equally put words into the mouths of the interviewees, the latter practice being one to avoid (Douglas, Roberts & Thompson, 1988, p. 29; Hoopes, 1979, pp. 85-86). The ethical considerations of the oral historian were also pertinent to my study as I shall develop later.

At the beginning of the first interview I clearly stated to each participant that I was interested in their experience of the ATP, that there were no right or wrong answers; that they might decline to answer a question and that if they wanted to think about a question they could have as much time as they needed to do so. I had arranged the tape recording equipment to be evident, but as unobtrusive as I could. In order to be as attentive an audience as I could, I did



not take notes during the interviews and, having committed the schedule to memory, referred to my interview schedule as little as possible. I mainly used nodding and smiling to reassure the participant that I was listening and understanding what they were saying rather than interrupt the flow of their conversation with verbal feedback. The interviews were semi-structured with open ended questions to prompt student teachers to reflect on their experiences and the answers of the student teachers were probed more fully as seemed appropriate at the time. Whilst the pre-planned questions included issues that were relevant to me, issues which were clearly significant to the student teachers were followed up with further probing during the interview (see appendix 2 for interview schedules). Using an open ended question to open the interviews elicited those issues which were most pertinent to the participants.

At the point which I considered was most appropriate to end each interview, I thanked the participants for coming in and for sharing their experiences. At the end of some of the second interviews I noticed that this point seemed to be one where other issues which were important to the participants emerged so I began to leave the tape recording equipment on, finishing the interview when I thought the participants were ready<sup>2</sup>. The interviews then shifted to a dialogue as the participants raised concerns for my thoughts or opinion, an issue which I address later in ethical dilemmas encountered in the study.

Before the participant arrived and after the participant had left I recorded in a journal my impressions, reactions and thoughts about the interview, the participant and myself. I attempted to include any information which I thought would help appreciate what went on. I had ongoing problems with gaining entrance to the rooms I had booked for the interviews and was often trying to find another room when I should have been orientating myself to the

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<sup>2</sup> The participants knew that the tape recording equipment was still running.

interview, a factor that aggravated my inclination to nervousness in approaching the interviews. Impressions of the state of mind or emotions of the participants were recorded along with my own reactions and responses to their stories. Points to follow up in subsequent interviews were also noted. When transcribing the tapes any other thoughts or points to follow up were also noted in the journal.

### **Development of themes**

Interviews were transcribed from the audio tapes into written texts which became the raw material. As I transcribed the tapes I noted any recurring images or particular themes which arose. At the end of transcribing each set of interviews I grouped and regrouped these images and themes to develop broader themes and to find possible relationships both across the participants and individually. As the intention was that the research be data driven, initial theories, concepts and relationships developed from comparing these themes were contrasted to incoming material from successive interviews and modified or elaborated throughout the course of the study as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1994).

Once all the tapes had been transcribed, common ideas were grouped and then sorted and ordered from general to specific. The themes which had been identified were divided into a number of categories and subcategories. The diagram built up from this process was then used as a basis for developing a tree index system for use in QSR NUD.IST 3.0<sup>3</sup>. All the interviews were used to create a document database for a NUD.IST project. Using

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<sup>3</sup> A computer package, QSR NUD.IST 3.0 stands for Qualitative Solutions and Research Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising. It was designed and developed by researchers at La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia, to aid in the analysis of non-numerical and unstructured data such as interviews, journals and field notes.

NUD.IST, sections of each interview were coded into the various categories that had been developed. New categories were created if a section did not fit into an existing category and the index system was modified accordingly. The original index tree was modified and rearranged slightly and some extra categories added as material was coded. Generally though, the main categories remained stable. Rather than providing any new insight, this process confirmed the themes I had identified.

These broad themes were used to begin structuring the final narratives. I view time in a linear fashion and value the structure provided by the sequential development of a story. I experimented with various approaches to presenting the narratives, from presenting each of the stories of the five participants individually from beginning to end, to presenting all the stories of the participants together from interview one through to interview 4. I attempted to begin writing from each perspective to find a way into constructing my stories, but it was Gray (1996) who provided the key I was looking for. In her own research, Gray had used the repetition of similar stories by her participants as a culling device, a determinant of the level of importance of the stories (Gray, 1996, pp. 48, 193). I had kept repeating several key stories to others who had asked me about my research study. I realised that the broad themes of what I considered the most important aspects of my study were encapsulated in these stories and thus they provided the structure needed for the narratives.

The themes for *Learning about teaching* and *The impact of assessment* had emerged as important in the narratives of the student teachers so I chose to use a combined approach incorporating several key narratives into each chapter. To separate the narratives into those of each individual would have been counter productive. *The baggage we carry - Craig's story* was different from the others. Other themes had emerged as being important in Craig's story and I thought they needed to be presented separately. Craig had thought this fitting as he viewed himself as having always been different from the rest. My own struggles as a researcher had also been an integral part of my interpretation and telling of Craig's story.

While I still wanted to keep the main focus of the reader on Craig, I also wanted to include some of my own struggle in the telling of Craig's story and experience. I chose to tell Craig's story separately from the others with my own struggle intertwined as a minor thread.

### **Ethical considerations**

As they shared their stories of their ATP with me, the student teachers disclosed something of themselves, who they are as people as well as student teachers, with me. Through my telling of their stories I have represented them as certain kinds of people and am mindful that I may have inadvertently made an unfair caricature of them. Through the same telling I revealed myself as a person as well as a researcher. Perhaps all storytelling carries such risks. I, at least, have had some control of what I shared about myself but just as inadvertently may have revealed more of myself than I intended.

To ensure the student teachers felt comfortable and would not feel compromised by my narratives, I returned the narratives of each individual to them before finalising my thesis. This helped achieve two objectives. Knowing I would be returning the narratives to the student teachers contributed to the integrity of the research. I also intended the process to give some control back to the student teachers, enabling them to clarify or differ from what I had written, enabling them to still have a final say. When certain changes were crucial to the student teacher feeling comfortable with the narrative, we negotiated an arrangement in which we were both satisfied with the outcome. When a student teacher wanted to clarify a situation or statement that had been made by them or by myself, I included their perspective in the body of the text or as a footnote.

Narrative appealed to me because I wanted to be 'up front' about my own subjectivity. I think that all research is influenced by the researcher's subjectivity, but in narrative, at least, I can be honest about that subjectivity. What I had not anticipated was having to be quite so honest

about my subjectivity. I had not realised how much narrative as a research method compels one to confront one's subjectivity. I had intended to keep the voice of my participants foremost. This was to be their story. What I included overtly about myself would be minimal. Yet I found that I could not be honest about my research without including myself a lot more than I had intended. Quite unexpectedly, my multiple selves, myself as a mother, as a teacher, as a person with certain values, had come crashing into this research. From time to time, I found my role as a researcher interviewing my participants suddenly usurped by these multiple selves as I reacted to some of the stories the student teachers shared with me. I know of the contents of one particular part of an interview only because I had taped it. During those particular moments I had been struggling with my own reaction even as I tried to maintain some objectivity as a researcher. A related dilemma arose in writing up the narrative for that participant. To not include my own reaction seemed dishonest. To write an account including my reaction fully would draw away from the importance of the story of the participant. The dilemma was resolved with the recognition that, for me, the story of my participant was more important in the context of this study. The story of my own reactions belonged to a different time and place.

As noted earlier, I had entered "a political minefield". I became very concerned about how to protect my participants without omitting crucial experiences. What had been shared with me had been shared in a climate of confidentiality, but other key players not only would have access to my thesis but also the power to influence the employment prospects of my participants. Although confidentiality could be joked about at the beginning "Confidentiality, good. You will have to be like Mission Impossible. Destroy the tape at the end [laughs]" (Interview 1), by the end, confidentiality had become a big issue. As one student teacher pleaded "Just don't mention my name. Don't let them know it's me." (Interview 4). I became very conscious of having to make careful choices in the material to include in my narratives. I had to grapple with wanting to protect my participants, but at the same time recognising that

in attempting to protect them, I would also protect those who appeared to have abused their power in the situation. Such key players could also legitimately argue that my study was not an accurate account when they had not been able to give their perspective, which could have, and most likely would have, given quite a different rendition of what had occurred.

As each interview seemed to draw to a close, I thanked the participants for their time and for sharing their stories. My 'ending' of the interview appeared to be a cue for the participants to then question me. The main issue for most of the participants at the end of the second interview was one of reassurance. How were they going in comparison to the other participants? Was their experience particularly terrible or were the others also having a hard time? I do not know how often other interviewers have their participants ask them questions. I do know that while I did not want to betray the confidence of the other participants, I was not prepared to fob the questioning participants off with a mere acknowledgement of their feelings of insecurity and need for reassurance. The student teachers sitting before me were coping with a stressful situation which had wider ramifications for them than just surviving to the end of the ATP. I agreed with Oakley (1981) that the use of interviewing practices which portray the interviewer as the expert who is, and must remain, unbiased and uninvolved is "morally indefensible" (p. 41). In response to these particular questions of the participants, I was able to point out that I could not betray the confidence of the other participants, but that from my work with other student teachers on the ATP, their experiences were not uncommon.

Repeated interviewing lends itself to the development of a responsive relationship between interviewer and interviewee which contributes to the quality of the information given. My own attitude of empathy towards the student teachers and assurance of confidentiality may have encouraged the participants to regard me as a source of support and information not just a data-gatherer. I also viewed the student teachers as participants in the study rather than

subjects of the study, creating both a different role for them and for myself. In this situation, I thought it would be inappropriate not to answer their questions and concerns.

## **Audience**

Although my original aim was that student teachers could gain insight into the experience of being a student teacher on ATP and the ways in which these experiences impact on the practical theory of teaching of student teachers, the nature of the stories the student teachers shared shifted the focus from one audience to another. Initially, future student teachers were the primary audience and the Faculty of Education a secondary audience in the study. The participants clearly hoped that their stories would contribute to the improvement of the practicum or at least reduce the difficulties some student teachers can experience. Much of what the student teachers shared had implications for the Faculty in preparing student teachers for their practicum experiences and for the placement, supervision and assessment of student teachers on practicum. The more I heard from the student teachers the more I became aware of a need to shift my thinking to seeing the Faculty of Education as my primary audience. My findings are, therefore, oriented to the Faculty of Education as a primary audience. Nevertheless, future student teachers are still close to my heart and it is to them that I address my final comments.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **LEARNING ABOUT TEACHING**

Learning to teach involves wrestling with and making sense of a wide variety of situations which can occur in classrooms and schools. Each practicum placement has its own particular blend of opportunities and challenges for the student teacher. Teacher educators use the term 'critical incident' to refer to those incidents which confront us with the beliefs and assumptions which are behind our teaching practice. Such incidents can lead to teachers examining themselves and their teaching. While each participant had particular incidents that caused them to reflect on their teaching, Jodie, Christina and John had situations which provided opportunities for them to learn more about themselves, and to examine some of the broader issues that can be experienced in teaching.

#### **Learning from special needs children - Jodie's story**

Jodie had experienced a remote practicum at a desert community school. Such a teaching environment was different from those Jodie had previously been exposed to and therefore likely to create the confrontations with her beliefs and assumptions that are characteristic of critical incidents. I wondered how this experience had impacted on Jodie's ideas about teaching. "Probably more with resolving conflict. In their classroom management, they were very into getting the children to tell them what happened, not saying 'Stop doing that. You don't hit them'. They'd come and say 'Why did you hit them? What did you do to make them hit you?' So in that respect it was very interesting." Jodie hoped to carry this over into her own teaching "but lots of time, lots of patience, needed for that."



Jodie was allocated to a small year one class in a government school. The school has a special needs class to which Jodie was assigned for teaching experience on a Monday afternoon. The special needs children spend most of their day in the special needs class. After an early afternoon teaching session, they are mainstreamed in the standard classrooms, known as their home rooms, for the remainder of the afternoon.

Two special needs children have Jodie's year 1 class as their home room. "They are both Aboriginal. Herzl, I didn't know what was wrong with him, cos I went up north to the remote Aboriginal community. He seemed normal to me, more normal than the kids up there in the classroom situation. I'm not really sure. I was speaking to [my teacher] today and going through all the kids so I could get to Herzl and say 'what is wrong with him? Is he labelled anything?' and she just said 'oh, when he first came, he didn't follow instructions or would forget things and stuff like that.' But the kids up north, they didn't understand instructions and I watched him in the classroom and the way he learns and the way he follows instructions is by watching other children and that's what they do ... there's about three Aboriginals in the junior end. One is definitely a special needs, but him, I don't know."

"She was saying with a lot of them, like the other one, Vincent, he hasn't had a lot of exposure. He doesn't know the difference between a whale and a dolphin. He hasn't had lots of stories and done lots of things so he's lacking in that regard so I'm just wondering if Herzl is as well. I'll keep my eye on him. But he does fine in mainstream."

Half way through the ATP, Jodie is finding it difficult to adjust to the special needs children. "I had a child swear at me and tell me 'F off you f'ing bitch' and all the rest of it and he's from ed. support so I do take him on Mondays and I told him at lunchtime to go out of this area he wasn't meant to be in and he said that to me and I just went 'Oh!' I was very shocked and didn't know how to handle it so I didn't say anything. I didn't reprimand him or anything and I just went and told his teacher and I said 'Look I don't know how to handle this. This is what happened.' And she goes 'That's fine.' Apparently that's him, he does that

a lot and that was the best thing to do, so that was good. And then after that I think I was all still shaken from that, and I was going 'Don't take it personally Jodie.' But it's still hard. It was a big shock to me. And then another ed. support came into the class, he comes in in the afternoon and he ran out crying and I was going 'Oh, great.' And that all sort of calmed down and then I kind of lost my confidence after that. But I've been managing to pick it back up which is good. I think that brought the whole week down."

Although Jodie had only twenty children in her class including the two special needs children, she found "when the ed. support kids come in it throws everything out of whack and because I'm so worried that they are going to misbehave I'm probably trying to wait for it. So I think that's a real problem."

Jodie particularly experienced this concern with one child who did not seem to be coping with being in the mainstream class. "But when Vincent comes in from ed. support, that really throws me, because I don't know much about him. He comes in and disrupts everyone and his attention span is very limited and I don't really know what he likes to do and so I said to Kerry 'What should I prepare for Vincent?' and she goes 'Well he's here to be mainstreamed so he needs to do the work that we're doing.' But he doesn't and he can't really. So it's quite hard because he disrupts everyone and everyone's disrupted."

I wondered how Jodie's experiences were impacting on her views about mainstreaming. She responded "I'm having huge mmm. I'm really split about it."

Jodie saw two sides to the mainstreaming question. On the one side "I'm sort of finding when he comes in that I sort of abandon everyone else. So I'm focusing on him all the time. So all the other kids in the class aren't learning because I'm concentrating on him and I think that's really unfair." On the other side "then I think he has to learn to behave in society so it's important that he does come in, so I don't know."

While Vincent is in the special needs class he is okay. "He's in his own environment so he's always happy. He still plays up but it's not as noticeable probably because they're all playing up." There is the problem of what is being modelled by other children in the special needs class "this other kid Frankie chucked an absolute spae the other day, a huge tantrum. They all sort of watch and then I find that Vincent does things that the other kids do, so I think if you keep them all together they're going to get worse. So he has to come into the mainstream classes just to see how everybody else functions. It would be ideal if you had an aide for everybody but that's not reality. I don't know about mainstreaming. I think you do need it but I think you need a lot of support. I think the ed. support teachers need to find out what's going on in the classrooms and say 'This is what you can do to help.' They need to have heaps of communication between them."

Jodie was not enjoying her experience of teaching in the special needs class on Monday afternoons. "I dread going into ed. support on Mondays and it will always be the last lesson I prepare during the week. I'll do Friday, all the way through, and then I'll come back to Monday and 'All right, what am I going to do?' It's one hour story writing and that's it, but I don't know what to do and I can't think of anything and I ring up Celine and go 'Right, what's another story writing lesson I can do?' I just dread it. Because I'm going in and I don't know their behaviours. I go in and I feel like I'm kind of blind and I'm just teaching this lesson and just hoping that they're not going to do whatever they do and I don't know what to expect from them and stuff, whether they're doing a good job or not. So I didn't really enjoy it."

Because of this, Jodie would have liked to have changed out of the special needs allocation. Jodie also thought her time was being wasted. "I've got them for an hour and I teach and then I spend the rest of the afternoon there but they go off to their home rooms to mainstream and so there are about three kids and they play lego or activities so I felt that I was really wasting my time." For the following weeks, Jodie had arranged to teach her lesson and then

accompany one of the children back to another classroom, but observed “I’ve still got that one hour story writing which I dread.”

Rather than having a problem thinking of ideas, Jodie saw her main problem as relaxing with the children. “Initially it was like ‘Ed. support, what do I expect of them?’ But I’m learning more and the other teachers are there so I figure ‘All right. They will let me know if somebody doesn’t normally do that.’ So now it’s sort of ‘Who are these people? Who they are [as people], how can I teach them? ...It’s been interesting and all, but I think I’d rather go there in the morning when they actually do, I think probably do maths. I’d like to do language. I’d like to see them do maths and language. They come in after lunch and they don’t want to write. Their drugs are wearing off ... .. but I’m on a count down, 4 more. It’s shocking, but.”

By the end of the ATP Jodie had learned how to deal with some of the problems she had faced half way through the practicum. “Vincent, the special needs, he still gave me problems ... but I took to sitting him on my lap because basically I was holding him the whole time anyway, like just conducting the lesson. But I took to letting him sit on my lap and I’d just rub his back and he would snuggle into me and he was fine. He just wanted attention and so I figured, may as well give it lovingly to him instead of growling and that’s what I did.”

The story writing lessons in the special needs class also improved dramatically. “The week after the last interview I made fairy bread. Well, a huge success, and got them to write the procedure so they wrote up the procedure and then they ate it. To eat it worked really well. And then I went to the other class and that was good because then I got to see inside another class. I found that, because I knew that I was leaving, I wasn’t going to be sitting around doing nothing, I put more into it and because it was food, they all wanted to participate. It worked very well. So we made fairy bread and then we made popcorn with an automatic popcorn maker. And then I thought I’d better get away from the food just to show I can actually do something. And then we read *Three Billy Goats Gruff* and had a picture of the

billy goat with a speech bubble and they would write what he had to say and also one with the troll. They would have to write what he would say. It went really well and the teacher was really impressed saying 'Oh thanks for that. Story writing was so much fun.' So I enjoyed it in the end."

I wondered what Jodie thought had caused the change.

"The food. The food. And I could see that they wanted to write and that motivated them. So as soon as I did the fairy bread it was 'What are we doing? What are we doing this week?' So they were motivated. And because I did a follow up food they were still up there and even when I came in the third time and didn't do food they still wanted to do it. We acted out the *Three Billy Goats Gruff* so that was really good. It worked out."

Although she could cope with one hour a week in a special needs class, Jodie thought "I wouldn't volunteer myself to work in special needs. It's too hard."

While Jodie still did not think she had come to any clearer ideas about mainstreaming generally, she had come to a firmer conclusion about the special needs children in her class. "If I was in that situation the whole time I would say that Vincent needs to go to pre-primary because he doesn't have the basics so I don't know why he's in year one. They had another one in the class in term one, and they put him back to pre-primary because he didn't have the basics. I don't know why Vincent is still there. Because Herzel who's being mainstreamed as well, he's fine. He knows what to do and he does it and that's it."

I said that I thought that, in relation to her teaching, the special needs situation challenged Jodie the most, a statement she agreed with. "Definitely. I think that's for most people too. Like if they've got ADD people in their class their focus is on that. Because if discipline is all right it's much easier isn't it?"

## On death and dying - Christina's story

Towards the end of the ATP, Christina's teacher had been sick and for the four days she was away, Christina had the class to herself. The relief teacher who had been brought in had provided support and relief teaching to other teachers in the school. "She was never in the classroom. She was basically just there in the morning so the parents could see that she was there ... That was just excellent. I loved it. It was really good because you didn't have someone over your shoulder all the time ... But it was a bit hard because we had a girl in my class whose mother died."

The child's mother had died suddenly. "It was really sad. Beautiful family too ... It was really sad so I had to tell the kids about that because my teacher wasn't there. And then two days later a child was killed in a car accident. And I had to tell them about that too."

Christina didn't have the teacher there when she had to tell the class. "I was going 'How do you tell year two's this sort of thing?' It was really hard, but they all coped pretty well."

I wondered how a twenty year old would manage such a task. "I just basically told them the facts. I just said 'This is what has happened.' And I didn't allow for much discussion because otherwise we'd hear about my dog that died, and my grandma who died. So I just said it. I didn't say it in a heartless way or anything, but just came out and said it and sort of said to them that 'people will be upset in the school and try to be on your best behaviour' and all this sort of thing. And they're 'yes Miss.' But it was really awful. The next two days at school were just terrible. In the staffroom was awful. There was just this dull murmur. It was really not nice, but they all coped with it really well. A few kids put their heads down, but nothing really. I don't think that at that age they understand."

Interestingly, Christina's own experience helped her in her management of the situation. "I had a book, because when my mother died, my brother was year two as well, so I had this book that my brother had been given. It's called *Lifetimes*. It's a really, really good book.

It's won one of those award things so I brought that in. It basically says that everything has its own lifetime and it goes through insects and birds and butterflies and then in the end it goes through people and says 'Don't be sad about it because that's just how it is.' It's very simplistic. The first time you read it you might think 'It's not that nice and sincere. You'd think they'd go on about feelings and that type of thing.' But for this age it's laying down the facts so I read it to the class, which was a bit funny, and then I gave it to, because that girl wasn't at school whose mother had died, so I gave it to her dad to read to the kids, to his little kids, which he said 'is really good'."

Although the situation was a big one for Christina to handle by herself, she commented "it was good for the experience. I know that sounds terrible but they were all fine about it. I had to watch how they'd react. Danielle, the one whose mother had died, she'd been away from school for a while, then, when she came back, this is when it happened for this girl and she was a bit quiet, but apart from that she seemed fine. I was watching her actually because she was all right during the day, just seemed normal. She looked for me for a lot of attention. If she was doing something she'd look at me and I would just smile at her and she'd get back and do it, looking for I don't know what it was. Her dad said that she's the worse at home, like she doesn't want to go to sleep at night, cries when they go to the cemetery and that sort of thing. She's the one that's upset. But she seemed fine at school, but I don't know. She's such a beautiful kid.

So without giving her too much attention, I did give her support, a pat on the head and that sort of thing, now and then. But I certainly didn't know how to react, but I felt I had more of a relation to her because I'd been in the same situation before, and I knew exactly how she'd be feeling. So I guess that could have helped. It was probably the only good thing that came out of it really, that I could understand how she was feeling. Seeing my brother as well at that age. I guess they were a lot alike. He just covered it up completely and that's what she was like. So it was interesting."

## **When relationships do not work - John's story**

Student teachers have little control over who they are placed with and often receive little preparation for dealing with situations which stem from incompatibility with their supervising teacher. With the added pressure of the impact of the assessment in the ATP on future employment prospects, some student teachers may opt to withdraw from their placement and defer their ATP to the following year hoping for a more suitable match. John found himself in a situation where the relationship with his supervising teacher was different from the relationships he had experienced with other supervising teachers on previous practicums.

Brought up a Catholic and educated in the Catholic education system, John had worked in managerial positions and travelled extensively before entering the teacher education programme at Edith Cowan University. John had always intended to enter teaching and had found past practicum experiences very satisfying. "I've done two Catholic schools and two government schools and I think I've got an inclination that I will go into the Catholic system, mainly because I was in the Catholic system and I feel comfortable and I know the routine, and in fact it wasn't until I came to uni that I realised that there was a distinct difference between government and private schools. All four praes were outstanding. They were really good. I really enjoyed them, and neither one, neither school was better than the other. They were all on an equal par."

For John, the big difference between the two systems was "the community feel of the private schools and I felt the more individual time they take. But in all honesty as well, those two government schools I went to have that as well in a sense, not as much, but you could feel that in the ethos, just the feel of the place. I'd say, it's the community feel. It doesn't just stay in the classroom. It kind of goes outside as well."

John had been allocated to a Catholic school and had arranged to meet Sue, his supervising teacher, before the ATP began. John thought she "has high expectations and she has high



standards and wants me to go and do the hard work.” John’s expectations of Sue were that she “give as much feedback as possible, as often as possible, both negative and positive, and maybe some direction as well I guess. ... I’m hoping with the programmes she can give me some direction or some advice on the direction I can take or if I suggested she could guide me through in some way, not to spoon feed me by any means, but just to put some light at the end of the tunnel for me would be a good help and basically to let me take over the classroom.”

While John thinks Sue is quite willing for him to take over the classroom, he is concerned that she will find the situation “frustrating” and is concerned that Sue is “under quite a bit of pressure because of the two [special needs] kids that are in there, especially the boy. He often hits her and pushes her and that sort of thing. I think she finds that quite frustrating so I hope the pressure of me in the class and that sort of aspect of it, plus the kids [isn’t too much for her].”

John’s first week of the ATP started well but nose dived on the first Thursday when a spelling lesson “fell apart ... It’s actually probably the worse lesson I’ve had, maybe it’s not, it just felt like it, in all my practices so far ... My teacher insists that it wasn’t a disaster, but I think it was. And from there, for some reason, I just couldn’t get it together for the next couple of days. My lessons were fine, but I wasn’t feeling completely confident. I felt like I was almost just survival teaching.” John expressed confusion about what was happening as he had not experienced a similar situation in previous practicums. He appreciated the university supervisor, George, visiting the following Tuesday. “He reassured me that everything was going fine and it took time too. So it’s been really up and down, but his visit certainly turned it around ... He asked me whether it was a confidence thing and I was determined not to admit that it was, but I think, looking back now, probably I did lose a bit of confidence.”

John has decided to establish his own management system but is perplexed that a problem with classroom management has arisen. "It's never ever been ... In all my pracs it's never been a problem", a statement he made several times throughout the second interview.

John describes himself as "the only prac<sup>4</sup> student at my school, so it's kind of a lonely world" but he has used the opportunity to get to know staff and to join in the school's activities, playing music at Mass and becoming involved in the interschool sports programme. "I found that on my other pracs, [it was good to] get involved with the staff." Such involvement doesn't extend to his supervising teacher. "Although my teacher isn't, she's a smoker. You know the smokers, they smoke outside ... she's, kind of, a bit more reserved, doesn't worry about the tea room chatter kind of thing, which is good too. I don't usually see her at recess because she's smoking and that's good too. I think she enjoys it as well." At a later point, he assures me that "we're not having a personality clash or anything like that but ..."

Although John said that he was reasonably happy with his mid semester Progress Report, he was still bemused by problems he had never experienced before in previous practicums. "But those areas there I've never ever had a problem with before in my other pracs. Things like motivation, which Sue mentioned, I've never had a problem with motivation ... The things that she's mentioned have not been a problem before, relaxing with the kids and that type of thing." He recognised "I've had the feeling with all my pracs, my other pracs, that they have been really successful, successful in that I felt really good. I'm at this stage now where I'm not feeling good, not completely good on this prac And looking back at my last pracs I was a lot more relaxed and it was a lot more natural."

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'prac' has become a part of the student teachers' vocabulary and will be used throughout as a noun in its own right.

When I asked him what he thought was the main reason for him feeling ill at ease on this practicum, John responded “I’d say it’s probably that that connection not being there with my teacher. I’d say that. I’d say that would be the main thing. That’s the most obvious to me.” John was feeling he was “not really doing my best” and attributed this to the teacher. While on the one hand John perceived Sue “was basically structuring the lessons for me”, he also thought “she’s very much into independence, for me to be independent, completely independent.” Sue was telling John “You’ve got to be more creative. You’ve got to be more innovative.” John seemed confused with such apparent mixed messages.

Bryce, the deputy, made a point of speaking with John. “He said that I needed to relax more in my lessons. The more I did that the more confident I became and informal I became with the kids. So I took that on board. That was fair enough. I guess all up I just haven’t felt relaxed up until this last week ... I wouldn’t say that it’s a personality clash, but it’s certainly not comfortable. Not completely comfortable. That’s, I guess, because she’s trying to keep a professional standard and she’s very forward about things. She knows what she wants. I wouldn’t say it’s a personality problem but it’s not feeling like I can go up to her and ask her something very confidently or very comfortably ... the first thing that the deputy asked me was how I was getting on with Sue so maybe she said something to him about it that she was thinking things weren’t going too well as far as our relationship or whether he just asked that.”

John thought “that it’s an extra pressure for her for me to work in the class ... I can see it stressing her a bit.” He is “not sure how she’s going to react. I think that’s where, in fact I’m definite, that that’s where this relaxing thing has entered into it. I think that not feeling that I am able to be myself around her makes it difficult to be relaxed with the kids when she’s in the room. That’s where that’s coming from. It’s really amazing how much influence the teacher can have or how much impact the teacher can have on your practice.”

Communication was obviously awkward. "I have a learning centre going now and Sue's pretty excited about that. She didn't actually tell me, she wrote it down. This is the other thing. Positive feedback she writes down. I guess that's a part of the connection not being there, it's hard for her to really say "This is really good"."

Little things were becoming frustrating. "The door. She likes the door open rather than the door closed. The noise outside doesn't bother her, but it bothers me when I'm teaching because I can see my kids are getting distracted ... She'd prefer the fresh air I think. I'm always aware of that ... Her things are her things. Like we're talking about a pen! Very, this is her domain."

A sense of helplessness was growing. "It's frustrating because what is happening is subtly, by some means, in some ways is out of my control, like my relationship with my teacher. There's only a certain amount I can do to help foster that. Really it's up to her. It's not up to her, it's the person she is and I can't change that and she probably doesn't want to change that."

In week 7, the situation deteriorated further. George was expecting John to be recommended for an Outstanding and week 7 was the week the recommendation would need to be made to the university, but in John's words, Sue "basically didn't want me to be recommended. At no point did she actually see me and directly talk to me about my mark. She left that up to Bryce, the deputy principal."

In a previous interview, John had expressed his admiration of Bryce. "I look at our deputy principal and he's in his early 30's and he didn't get an Outstanding and he's professional, he's organised, he's professional, he knows how to deal with people. He's got those people skills and he's up there. He would seriously be looking at a principal's position, if not in that school in another school, in a few years time."

Bryce asked John how he thought his marks were going and when John mentioned George's optimism and expressed his own positive view of how he was teaching, Bryce asked "Okay, tell me honestly, how are things going with you and Sue?"

And I said 'Well.'

And he said 'No I want you to be really honest.'

And I said, 'Well to tell you the truth from the start I felt really intimidated and she's been very territorial and it's been really difficult. Everyone's been telling me to calm down and to relax and be myself. Well I've found that extremely difficult and I've never ever had a problem with that before. I found that extremely difficult in her classroom. The last thing I want to do is to come across to her that I'm trying to take over things so I'm being very cautious in what I'm doing.'

Bryce indicated that he had taken a while to learn ways to work with Sue and that John needed to do so also. "He sort of said 'You need to straight away take action and open the communication barriers. I spoke to George this afternoon and he asked if you could be recommended and I said we're still deciding'."

John took Bryce's advice and approached Sue that afternoon. "We went through a couple of things and that was okay but a lot of tension, really uncomfortable speaking one on one." The next morning John asked Sue if he could have five minutes with her that afternoon. Because John was very concerned about Sue thinking he was taking over the class, he wanted to clarify with Sue whether she was happy with the number of lessons she had given him. "And she just went off basically. She said 'I don't know why you're asking me this. I wouldn't have given it to you if I wasn't comfortable'." Sue then raised a number of issues that had annoyed her. John summed the situation up as "basically there was a communication problem there. And so at this point I'm thinking 'Well this attempt has failed.' So I went home ready

to quit my ATP. I thought 'This is really bad.' I didn't think I'd scrape in a Highly Competent. I thought 'I'm going to get Competent at the very, very best here'."

John returned to school on the following Monday "and basically I had in mind packing her bags and kicking her out of the classroom." Sue "was away for the morning and I had the class to myself and those few hours I really used to establish myself."

Sue commented "Huge improvement. You're a lot different in front of the kids than you were last week. Your voice is different."

And I thought 'Have you clicked on here? Have you clicked on to my confidence has picked up because you're not here? And the reason for that is because of you obviously.' But I didn't say anything."

On George's next visit, Sue "did some really strange things that I don't know why she did, but she did them. For example, I was taking a lesson and I set them some work and I checked to see that they were going and then they were doing the right thing then I started conferencing and then she started walking around and started conferencing herself and George said to me I should have been doing what she was doing, moving around the classroom. I don't know why that happened, why she did that then. But this is what I mean because she would interrupt lessons and take over things at certain times, not take over, but interrupt them and still want me to be one hundred per cent in control."

Once the decision had been made not to recommend John for Outstanding, John found "we got on great. We got on fine. I mean we weren't best of friends but no problems. She was doing things for me. She was getting stuff printed up for the kids for me. She was offering to do things. She was fine. She recommended a couple of things to me. So I don't know what happened. Maybe she got her way. I could always tell she wasn't happy with what other people wanted me to get, what Bryce thought I was going to get and what everyone wanted me to get. She thought she had a bigger picture of it all ... I left on a really good note with

her, she organised two jobs for me. I've been offered this job with Kumon. She set up two part time jobs for me with Kumon tutoring and so that's in the workings now ... And also she was asked whether she knew somebody for tutoring ... Sue recommended me. That was interesting, very, very interesting ... So I don't have to work in a café any more. I can do some fairly decent part-time work. So that's great. I've got that all organised. And I left on a great note with her and I left on a good note as far as my teaching, so I can't wait. I can't wait for next year. Can't wait to have my own classroom ... yeah, I'd be a teacher any day. I can't wait."

For John, the relationship with his supervising teacher was an important part of his learning about himself, about teaching and about professional relationships in schools. It was also an important factor in the assessment he was given, and the impact of the ATP on him.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT

The final teaching mark for the ATP is important for the student teacher's future employment prospects. The detrimental impact of the assessment based context of the practicum on "the trialing of ideas considered central to an individual's practical theory" has already been noted (Kettle & Sellars, 1993, p. 36). The factors that impinged on the assessment of the ATP were disturbing as was the impact on the participants.

#### **The impact of professional relationships - John's story**

John did not raise assessment as a personal issue in the first interview, but he did see the main purpose of the ATP as "the only way that the university can evaluate how well you've learned academically and practically at the same time ... I can see it as an evaluative process, and I think that's very fair too because a lot of people who have done well in their pracs, in their practicals, haven't been rewarded for that as yet, whereas the people who have done well academically are recognised a lot more and those academic students sometimes aren't as good in the classroom as your borderline 69 - 70. So that's what I feel, so I think it's very fair that you be evaluated in that way."

John was pleased with his supervisor's third visit in week 6. George had said to John "you're certain to be recommended for Outstanding. If you keep on this pattern you're going quite well to be recommended." John had been experiencing a difficult practicum with Sue, his teacher, and in week 7 "things really took a dive with my teacher. Week 7 was the killer week, week 7. Because they were supposed to recommend that week. And it all just fell apart. She basically didn't want me to be recommended." With advice from the deputy



principal, John attempted to resolve the communication barrier with his teacher, with limited success. Despite the situation, John “really went for it. And George, the supervisor, came in on week 9 saw my lesson and he said ‘Fantastic. Going well ...It’s too late now for you to be recommended. You’ve progressed really well’. [George] wrote in his report that I have the potential to be an Outstanding student and I’m a Highly Competent/Outstanding student ... Well, he thought I should have been recommended I feel.” The supervisor had been unaware of the problems between John and his teacher. John “didn’t tell him anything” because of a perception that the supervisor “was really cliquy with Sue.”

John was quite disappointed with his professional development mark. “She gave me a Highly Satisfactory for my professional mark ... I don’t know where that came from. I have no idea where that came from. Bryce said to me in week 5, ‘Professionalism, out and out Outstanding. I can give you that now’. So I thought I was doing the right thing, I hadn’t changed anything ... She commented that it was a highlight, a highlight of my practice was my professional development. But still she gave me Highly Satisfactory.”

John recognises “to say I should have been given Outstanding, I don’t know, you don’t know and I guess they don’t know either. But the point is I didn’t feel as if I had had the best prac and felt I was the best person I could have been and I will wonder if I could have done further. I can say that I’m pretty certain that I would but I can’t prove that. But that’s the thing, it’s not whether or not I would have got Outstanding ... I can’t say ‘I gave it my best shot’ and that’s the most disappointing and frustrating part about it.”

John’s professional relationship with his supervising teacher had been difficult and stressful. John had continued to strive towards an Outstanding throughout the latter half of the ATP but clearly found the difficult relationship with his supervising teacher impinged on his ability to be the teacher he thought he could have been in a situation with a more compatible supervising teacher.

## **Frustration with the assessment - Christina's story**

In the first interview, Christina expressed concern about her ability to survive the ATP “because I know even with these two week pracs I burnout by the second week, and I’m counting down the days. I don’t want that to happen. I don’t want to be going ‘Can’t wait’ and having the calendar on my wall crossing it off. I want it to be enjoyable ... I just want to do everything right. I just want to be the best of everything. That’s a problem I have. Things have to be organised with me so I’m very fussy about things. I get good results. I want my teachers to tell me what I am doing wrong and I’ll do everything not to do it.”

Christina doesn’t know what to do differently to prevent the burnout from occurring. “I don’t know. I don’t think I’ll honestly be able to do it because I know I will just put pressure on myself, I will just have to, but it’s just so hard to do, I know, I know now that I will put pressure on myself and that I probably will be whacked after the first three weeks but hopefully I’ll get into a pattern. It’s probably not going to help that much but if I get used to it, it might do.”

I asked Christina if the assessment was a part of the pressure she was experiencing and she responded “I’d like to say ‘no’, but it is. I don’t know how I’ll go. People always say ‘Oh, you’ll get Outstanding’ and all this, but I don’t know. It is a big thing. I know it doesn’t matter in the long run. I know it doesn’t matter but at the time, now, today, I want to do well. That doesn’t mean Outstanding. It means Highly Competent.”

Before the second interviews began, I wrote in my journal “everyone has been contacted and are happy to have a second interview. Christina is the only one who sounds stressed, like she wonders whether she’ll make it through the next week.” Christina’s interview was scheduled for the Saturday at the end of the second week. I waited, but she didn’t turn up. Later that morning I rang. She was aghast. As she explained she had been going non-stop and had completely forgotten. She was very apologetic. She sounded tired. The researcher in me

wanted to get her in and find out what was going on, but I knew Christina had the furthest to travel for the interviews and to reschedule another interview for the next weekend would take me out of the time frame for gaining initial impressions of the ATP. I suggested we leave the second interview and I would pick her up in the next round. She was concerned that she would “muck up the research” but sounded relieved to take up the option after I reassured her that it would be okay to omit this one.

Christina survived the first weeks of the ATP, observing in the third interview, that “the first three weeks, three to four weeks were the hardest. The first two weeks I was just whacked every night. I was just so tired.” At the end of week five of the ATP each student teacher received a Progress Report from the school indicating their progress and giving constructive suggestions for improvement. Christina was happy with her Progress Report. “It was good. I was pretty happy with it. The things she wrote on there that I need to improve on I’m really aware of anyway and we’ve talked about them a thousand times before. She was pretty positive about most things which was good.”

Christina found her teacher to be very supportive, but was frustrated with attempts to get recommended for Outstanding. Christina and her teacher had “been going through, a few times, the ATP book. We’ve gone through and she’s highlighted all the ones that she thinks that I’ve done and we talked about Outstanding and that sort of thing.” Christina’s frustration has centred on one criteria in the assessment which her teacher thinks no student teacher could attain. “She said she feels that for anyone to achieve that objective they have to have had experience. And I said ‘Well what can I do? There’s nothing I can do about it then?’ She said ‘No, there isn’t’.” Not satisfied, Christina took the issue further. “I spoke to my supervisor about it and said ‘What can I do?’ And she said ‘Well there’s nothing you can do.’ And I said ‘Who can get an Outstanding in primary then?’ What if I cover everything and can’t get that one? I think if she feels I really deserve to get an Outstanding I will anyway, but then again if someone gets held back just because of that one objective and other people get

pushed forward because of 'Oh well they've got everything else', then I think that's unfair." Christina returned to her frustration with the situation several times in the interview.

In interview 4, Christina described how she decided not to 'rock the boat'. "After I spoke to you last time I was really stressed out about the mark and everything and we had big conversations with my teacher about this sort of thing." Christina's supervisor and teacher erroneously "thought if you weren't recommended at week five then you couldn't get Outstanding." Despite the fact that "I stressed about it and stressed about it and I had a big conversation with my teacher and I was going to ring up uni and everything" Christina eventually "thought 'I can't be bothered' and so I said to myself 'Why am I so concerned about it. I feel I'm doing well and when I go out next year I feel like I know what I have to do and that's the main thing about this prac, that I wanted to get out of it.' The mark's a big thing too but anyway, ... I ummed and aahed about it for ages, and then I thought 'Oh stuff it. I won't. I'll just keep doing my best and see what happens.' So I got Highly Competent but I'm still really pissed off because on the last week [my teacher] says to me 'Yep. You're an Outstanding student.' In the last week! And I thought 'Come on. I'm still on prac This isn't fair. Why do I have to be ticked in that box when I know I should be in that one?' And we looked at all the objectives and I did everything, covered everything, but I wasn't recommended on week five. And I said 'Come on. That's ridiculous.' It's so subjective, the ATP, but if they're not all told the same thing that's ridiculous. It's just ridiculous. I just think it's a joke I really do ... Jacks me off a bit."

Having finally focused on her main goal for the ATP, to be able to go out the following year knowing what to do, Christina experienced a shift in focus. "Not so much, 'do this because this will look good' but 'do this for the kids.' And the other thing that I wanted to do, because I said to her I want to do something more, like I've done all my programmes and I'm cruising along and doing everything but I feel like I should do something else to help those kids who are falling behind." Christina decided to write and implement a special programme

for the English as a Second Language (ESL) children in the class. "So I did a programme for them too to help them with ESL stuff and that was good, seeing what sort of things they did ... they needed to do a lot of work on sounds and that sort of thing which was really interesting as well ... which is good I think because I learned more from that."

### **Happy with the assessment? - Jodie's story**

While John had to deal with the impact of a difficult supervisory relationship and Christina had to deal with her frustration at what appeared to be the injustice of the assessment, Jodie had to deal with what appeared to be a general apathy about her assessment.

Jodie was conscious of the pressure she was putting herself under. "I keep telling myself that it doesn't matter what I get, but you just want to do your best, and if I start thinking 'What's my best in terms of the university? What will they label my best as?' that's when I start panicking. I have to put that out of my mind and just do my best. And also that the children won't learn anything, that they won't develop. It's quite a big responsibility when you look at it like that. I hope I can achieve something."

In Jodie's mid-term progress report "the only real focus was discipline. To find my own thing that works for me and to do it. They're saying 'pretend that you're angrier.' Telling me to act really angry so I'm trying to do that." When no-one else is in the room, Jodie thinks "I'm much nicer and the kids respond that much better. ... Because they are saying 'act angrier' and stuff, I'm not sure about it. I think I need to. It's kind of when they're in the classroom I'm thinking about control so I need to growl but when they're not there I'm happy to let them go a little bit more than when there's someone in there." The advice Jodie received did not sit well with her but, by interview 4, she did find her own way to deal with the discipline. "I didn't act angry in the end. It wasn't working for me. Sometimes I'd be

growling and then I'd just feel like laughing. It was just foreign. It wasn't working, so I just found the songs and giving them hugs worked much better."

Jodie described her last five weeks as "It went really well. I just sort of cruised through. No problems" and said she was happy with her assessment. "Mainly in the comments. I'm really happy with the comments I got and the final report. I got Highly Satisfactory or Highly Competent."

Jodie then told me "They weren't telling me how I was going or what I was doing. So I went to Kerry, my teacher, and we went through the book and I said 'Where am I at and where can I go?' She said 'Well you're definitely at Highly Competent.' And I said 'Why aren't I being extended?' And she said 'Well, no reason you shouldn't be.' So I said 'Okay then.' And she said 'Why don't you ring up Keith (the supervisor) and ask him?' So I rang him up and brought him in and he said 'I don't really believe in giving Outstandings. I give them like once every three years if I'm really really impressed.' And I said 'Okay, well that's fine. Am I at Highly Competent?' And he said 'Yes'. And I said 'If I just keep going the way I am I'm definitely going to get that?' And he said 'Yeah, I'm very happy with the way you're going.' And everyone was happy with that and I just went through with that. I had no pressure."

I wondered how she felt about the supervisor's attitude given that he hadn't spoken to her at any of his previous visits.

"He only left about, in total, two pages written and he came in that time because I called him up and asked him to come in and he spoke to me. And he didn't really give me any advice. He just said 'Yes you're doing fine.' And then he left. And then he came in one more time, the last time, week 9, watched my lesson and didn't say a word to me. Are we actually getting a report from them?"

I couldn't believe I was hearing correctly so asked "so really, after any of your lessons with the supervisor, you never actually got to speak about the actual lesson?"

“No. And Kerry was like ‘I can’t believe Keith’s lack of following up with your prac.’ But I also think I don’t know if she actually looked at my programmes. So I think everyone was just going ‘You’re doing fine.’ Passing the buck kind of thing. And I think she was passing the buck for Keith and Stella, the principal ... everyone was just saying ‘Oh yeah. You’re fine.’ So I was a bit annoyed that I couldn’t, I didn’t push myself at all, I didn’t extend one little bit. I’m sure I could have done heaps better but ... Talking to other people their teachers were going ‘Right. We’re going to do this and we’re going to do that. You can improve on this and do that.’ I don’t know how I could change my programmes. I don’t know how I could change my records file. Anything. It was a very cruisey Highly Satisfactory. But that’s fine. It was very realistic. The last five weeks it was as if I was teaching. I didn’t have people looking over me at all. I didn’t have people going ‘You have to do this. You have to impress me.’ I went in there and if I did a good lesson I knew and the kids knew. And if I didn’t then it didn’t matter, I could improve the next day.”

Jodie saw the lack of feedback as positive. “Well I mean I’d have no problems going out there now. Like at first when I wasn’t getting much feedback it was like, ‘Why aren’t you looking at me? Why aren’t you seeing what I’m doing with the lesson?’ Because of our other pracs. So it gave me a real shock when nobody was paying much attention but that’s reality isn’t it? I’d have no problems now being self reflective.”

Although philosophical, Jodie did have moments of stress associated with the lack of support and guidance she experienced. “At times, I’d start feeling down, like ‘Why haven’t I been pushed? Why haven’t I been recommended?’ I would sort of go ‘It’s not fair.’ But then you think ‘What is?’ ... At times during ATP it was, when I started looking at what everybody else was doing, it was a big issue ... They were satisfied with that so I had to be really.”

Particularly stressful was a confirmatory visit made by Kerry, Jodie’s teacher, who was on the confirmatory panel. “She went out and saw someone. And I thought ‘She must know how I’m going.’ I justified it all by ‘They know what they’re doing.’ She came back and I

didn't want to ask her about it, but she offered information. She said 'Oh I think I'm being too mean on you, Jodie, you're streets ahead of this guy.' And I'm going 'Don't tell me now. No, that's not fair.' ... She went home and came in the next day 'I couldn't sleep because I don't know what to do about it.' ... She was worried about it. Because she didn't want to decline him and say 'No, you can't have it.' But he brushed up the second time and got everything that she'd said ... And he ended up getting it."

Jodie consoled herself with the fact that "I got really nice comments. Stella, the principal, she's very strict. She came in and saw some lessons. She gave me a great report back. I think the most proud thing for me of the whole ATP was her last line which said 'I'd be happy to have you as a staff member' and, oh my god, that was better than any mark I got. I was so proud of it ... I thought that was like the biggest compliment you would get from a principal."

Even though Jodie has seemed accepting of the situation, I was startled by her response when I asked her what she would change about the ATP for herself.

"If I was going into exactly the same situation I'd probably be more aggressive as in what I want. But that's because I know what I want now. I would ask for more, and demand more feedback and demand more attention and find out exactly what's needed and why, especially with my supervisor as well."

I was stunned. Quiet, poised, confident Jodie saying she would be aggressive and demanding? I commented that the words seemed strong for her.

"Yeah. Yep. Because I think everyone else was just happy to, you know how in the classroom you pay attention to the high achievers and the low achievers, and if you're the people in the middle they don't mind too much. Like they're happy, that's how I felt as well. So I was a bit aware in my classroom of paying attention to the kids in the middle."



“So the fact that you weren’t making a song and a dance meant you didn’t get the attention you needed?”

“Yeah, so I’d probably be more assertive.”

Despite wishing she had been more assertive about getting feedback and guidance, Jodie had noticed a change of focus in her thinking to “What can I do to facilitate the children’s learning. So the focus was off me, how well I’m going and on to the children. Seems like everything happened about the same time. I found out where I was, Highly Competent, then that was it. The focus was on them.”

### **Going for Outstanding - Celine’s story**

In the first interview, Celine wanted to enjoy her ATP, but expectations in the form of assessment were a factor she had to consider. “First and second year you think ‘I’d like to get Outstanding’, but now I think ‘I’d like to get Highly Competent’. I’m aiming for that, but if the supervisor says ‘You’ve got this, this, this, this and this to do and you’ll get Outstanding’, then I’ll go for it then, but once I reach the Highly Competent level I don’t want to put myself out to try and get extra. You’ve either got it or you haven’t. If it’s not coming naturally, then it’s not going to work in the end anyway.”

Celine’s progress report “was all ‘doing a fine job.’ You think ‘I want to hear what I can do.’ My teacher said ‘It’s not areas that you could improve on, it’s just stuff for future reference. Just to make sure you do this.’ And so it wasn’t really specific stuff. We read through it and I thought ‘Oh, that’s great. Ticks in the right box.’ There’s nothing new.”

Celine arrived at the third interview with a big smile on her face. “The last two weeks have been, end of last week, beginning of this week, I’ve had everything done and it’s just kind of go there and do it, but a bombshell dropped today.” Celine had asked Adele, her teacher, to review the ATP criteria with her “and now I’ve found out today that I’m going for

Outstanding and I'm just like 'Oh, there's too much pressure.' And she said 'No, you're doing really well. You might as well try for it.' And she said 'Right, you're Competent, you're Highly Competent and you've pretty much done Outstanding so you might as well try for it'."

Adele and Celine have spent time together working out what Celine can do to cement her chances of receiving an Outstanding. Even though she is looking at ways to improve in order to impress the confirming supervisor, Celine thinks that she won't change a lot of what she is doing already. "I know I'm not going to have this big huge change in the two weeks or four weeks or whenever they have to, if I just plod along the way I've been going. But I don't want to go back now and think 'Right I've got to do this and this.' ... Like I was quite happy with Highly Competent. But always thought if the opportunity came for going for Outstanding that sure I'd go for it, if I had this and this to do. But its kind of more to it than just that. Its the whole attitude kind of work and pressure and everything changed ... I assume I'm doing the right thing with teaching. I assume that's alright. But I don't want to be kind of making sure everything's really perfect. Its not realistic."

In interview 4, Celine told how she resolved the issue of coping with the pressure of being assessed for Outstanding by "I decided 'well I'm not going to go out of my way and be really silly and do all this extra stuff.' And so I didn't."

During her first visit, Linda, the confirming supervisor, had annoyed Celine because "I'd planned a... this great stuff for her and she sat at the back of the room. She couldn't see me teaching at all and didn't watch me at all ... She gave me some written comments but it was stuff like 'Your smile is the best I've seen in a while,' really irrelevant stuff." Celine was upset with comments made by Linda to her teacher. "She was saying things to Adele like the format of my language programme, she would have preferred it a different way. I said to Adele 'Well it's not her place to say that sort of thing. She's not there to do that. We've had four people in, that say its fine.' If there was a problem with that type of stuff I would have

expected to have heard before. And whether she prefers something different, that's personal opinion."

Celine was further aggravated by Linda's parting comments. Linda had said "I've made arrangements to come back next Tuesday morning. This is your chance to impress me. I want to see your strengths. And I want to see you teaching. I don't want to see what I saw this morning." Celine had been irritated "because it was routine stuff, story writing and a language lesson. And I got really annoyed at this lady. I was saying to Adele 'Look, it's not about impressing people. It's about consistency and how you are in the classroom.' She got me so annoyed and so angry because it's not about going out to impress someone on your ATP. It's about how everything else works together. And I thought 'What am I going to teach?' It's week 10, Tuesday. It's review. And grade one it's all about routine anyway. It's about establishing all the routines. And I went 'Oh great.' ... That day I was quite annoyed and quite narky about it all because I didn't agree with some of her comments."

Celine decided "to teach them how to address an envelope because we'd been buddying up with another year one class and been sending letters. So Monday I planned it so they wrote their letters so they were ready for Tuesday. I thought 'Okay, we'll address an envelope. Have like this big huge envelope ready to model. And I had the Jolly Postman and these songs and everything. It was an excellent lesson. And she came in and sat down for a while, watched my reading ... So I did the lesson and she was there for the first fifteen minutes sitting there watching, writing, well, sitting there looking through stuff, not paying much attention. Then the kids were off writing their envelopes." Soon after, Linda left.

Adele and Celine "had to go in and see the principal. We sat down and I still didn't think that I'd had because I thought 'Not with this lady.' Sat me down and she said 'I've just got you in here to congratulate you. You've got Outstanding.' And I went 'Pardon?' And the principal went 'Yes. You've got it.' And I went 'Oh my God.' I think Adele was more excited than me. She went 'No, you've done well.' And that was it."

Celine has mixed feelings about her grade, achieving Outstanding seemed a hollow victory. "Now I think 'Who cares?' Back then I thought 'Great' but what does it matter? It's done ... I still think, it's nice having Outstanding, but I still think it's not fair how they do it. It's based on a single person's opinion. I'm sure if I was in an upper school class, a grade seven class, I would be nowhere near it. It depends on who you get and what your teacher's like. I know some teachers don't put people up unless they're sure they're going to get it ... I can't get another solution to how they do the ATP but it's not very fair. Like to think that that Linda could just come in and say 'Sorry.' That would have had to have gone, whatever she said. She doesn't know how you've been working. You can't get a true indication of relationships and your whole classroom working if you're only there for an hour or so. And from that they decide whether you fit into the criteria they have decided upon. If I was in another classroom, I mean I was in with a great teacher, if I'd been in another classroom, I might have just cracked under the pressure. It's not very fair."

### **Satisfied with the assessment - Craig's story**

Craig only mentioned assessment in the second interview in relation to accepting his perceived difficulties with his teacher and the need to adjust his behaviour in order to obtain his mark. "So I've initiated most of the conversation, but if that's how it's to be that's how it's to be. I've obviously got to come out with a mark and if that means biting the bottom lip then so be it. I'm relatively philosophical about that."

For Craig the progress report showed "I'm not doing anything disastrously wrong nor am I doing anything particularly fantastically well apart from classroom control which they're happy with and my relationship with the kids they're happy with. So I got that. The observations and recommendations made by the teacher I thought were particularly astute. I was very happy with the report."

At the end of the ATP, Craig and the principal had a chat. "She said 'trying to assess you is quite difficult because you're competent in all of the areas but in other areas you're way up there'." Craig's final mark was "Competent ... I went into ATP tired. I scored a dose of not the flu, but a cold, it's still there a bit, so I was tired before I got there. And I really couldn't be stuffed doing anymore than competent to be honest. I'm happy with the mark, but a shade disappointed in my own personal effort. And realistically it took a lot longer than I actually expected it would to get in amongst things and I probably suffered from delusions of grandeur to some extent, the mature aged student who's dragged off the street and ends up being this brilliant teacher, and it would just all happen, so I didn't put the effort in. I was happy with the mark."

Assessment was not raised as a personal issue by Craig in the first interview and assessment was not a main issue for Craig in any of the interviews apart from making sure that he passed the ATP. For Craig, other factors had impacted on his experience of the ATP far more than the assessment.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE BAGGAGE WE CARRY - CRAIG'S STORY

A person's past experience influences their current behaviour (Egan, 1990, p. 162). Such influences can be positive or negative. Their impact can be empowering or crippling, minor or major. In Craig's story, the influences of his own schooling experience and his previous practicum experiences were important factors in his ATP experience. For myself as the researcher, the influences which impacted on me during this research were my experiences as a mother, and a teacher. As Craig, heavily influenced by his past, struggled to find his feet as a teacher, I, who had always maintained a distance from my research, struggled to deal with my 'multiple selves' deciding to gatecrash the study. While this is Craig's story of struggling with his past experience, it is also my story of struggle as a researcher with Craig's story. Both of us had brought unsuspected baggage to the study.

Craig Green is a mature age student who, as a child, went to Catholic schools until his last two years of secondary education. "I was very anti-authoritarian. I was told I would never succeed in life if I didn't get qualified so I set about to prove everybody wrong so I deliberately failed 4th year two years in a row." After working in a number of fields, Craig was encouraged by an associate, a university lecturer, to enter university. Craig chose teaching because "at that stage I was 40, and I thought 'I've got all these life's experiences and the high school kids are really going to benefit from my experience' and ... I just loved the idea of standing up there telling people, giving them new information, helping them become better at what they were doing ... when I went to my first teaching practice which was a primary school, I just bloody loved it." After that experience Craig transferred to the primary teacher education programme.

## **Impact on teaching practice**

### **Identifying with students**

For his ATP, Craig was allocated to a year three class in a small government school which is classified as Priority School (PSP) and thus qualifies for extra government funding. The school has a large number of single parent families, Aboriginal families, and ethnic families where English is a second language as well as a significant transient population ('Craig', 1997, p. 1).

After his first week of ATP, Craig reflected "a number of things have hit me right between the eyes. One of them is the beauty of the kids, I think, and even if they're little nuggetty, hard little buggers and I had a very interesting experience yesterday. I was on yard duty and I saw this kid who looked like he had already been boxing for a living. He was quite a tough looking kid. He was walking around tough. He was mixing with a bunch of kids that looked tough. And he saw me. He had hair so that he could constantly flick it from one side to the other and that was part of his routine. And I took a bit of an instant disliking to him and I found I was eyeballing him because of his behaviour and he was skirting around me as well. And then I thought 'is that really the way to go? Should I label this kid?' and I thought 'Yeah, I will, because I reckon he's the sort of kid that's going to get some of these other ones into trouble.' As it happened, in the afternoon he was allocated to our room, so he'd been given his warning, his 5, his 10, 's 15 minutes and he was out for an hour. So he ended up in our class and we actually moved to a drama room where the kids were involved in drama that required cooperation. So we were working in one part of the room and he was left right in the back on his lonesome. Anyway, lo and behold, after about 10 minutes into the thing, he was sitting there with this frown on his face as these kids do, he actually started to get involved in the activities on his own, where you had to stand up quickly, sit down, play dead and this

kind of thing. And I thought 'Yeah, give them a chance.' Cos there is, regardless of how hard they are, there is this little kid in them. There is this excitement in them and they really do want to let it out. He did this of his own volition, having a bloody good time. So I thought 'I'll talk to him.' So as we were walking back, he had a book, so I said 'do you mind if I have a look at your book?' It had one of these reflective silver things that are etched and reflect the sun. It's been etched in a way so that it refracts the light and gives multi colours. So I opened it up and it was a health thing and he said 'Oh, I'm not very good at drawing' and I said 'It looks pretty good to me'. Now we just generally got chatting and on the way back to the classroom, the teacher said 'Anyone who wants to get a drink or go to the toilet can do it now.' I felt like a drink of water so I had one. And he could have continued on with the rest but he actually hung back and waited for me. And so that was a good learning experience that. Certainly not to label the kids. That wasn't the strongest message. Perhaps the strongest one was that 'try to recognise the kid that is inside them and try to work on that.' So it will be interesting during the week to see what this kid's reaction is to me in the event that I see him again. So that was really important."

Craig identified with the children in the school. "Yeah, I think so. I haven't actually given that a lot of thought, but, yeah ... I can see kids doing things in the same way that I did, so I can understand if they're feeling lazy or 'help me I can't do it', or sort of 'head down on the table.' And I was actually watching one kid and I just thought back to when I was in grade 7, I was sitting there with my hand on my face and the teacher said 'Are you tired Mr Green?' and I said 'Nuh', put my head up just put it straight down again. And he thought 'I give up.' But that's alright. I don't mind that sort of thing. It happens ... Yeah, I certainly identify with the kids."

Craig was concerned about the children's "attitude to work, their attitude to themselves with respect to their own capabilities and initiative seem to be sadly lacking compared with what I have seen in other schools and certainly what I hear about as well ... we really do have to do



a lot of work so they realise their own abilities and hopefully make the most of their life's opportunities, because there are very bright kids who would automatically succeed if they were in completely different circumstance. That's really sad to see actually. That's probably why I want to work in that area, because I really love kids like that. They are so bright and energetic. They've got a bit of fight in them that I think works, will serve them well in the workplace provided they can actually do something. Show a bit of self initiative."

'How many of Craig's own teachers had echoed similar sentiments?' I thought and wondered how much identifying with the children in the class and in the school would influence Craig's behaviour as a teacher. Craig's story of classroom management seemed to provide a clue.

### **Classroom management**

Craig wasn't impressed with his supervising teacher's classroom management style. "Some of the looks that Katrin gives are really quite cutting, and piercing. But as the week's progressed, she seems to be more relaxed with the kids, and smiling a lot more and having a bit of fun with them as well. But she's much harsher on the kids than I would be. 'PUT THAT AWAY' and 'You touch that again and it's coming on my desk and you're NEVER GOING TO GET IT AGAIN' and all this sort of jazz whereas, that side of it I disagree with. My style of discipline is to correct behaviour incidentally and it's something that I learned mainly through Tekton Primary School and Areyonga [previous practicum schools] where if a kid's misbehaving, just apply the rules. Don't make any big deal about it."

Craig's resolve had been put to the test on the first Thursday of the ATP. "It was a terrible afternoon for a number of reasons. It wasn't terrible for me. The kids were really misbehaving. They had been to this Constable Care thing and they get them really hyped up ... so that meant reading the riot act." Later Craig elaborated "So after the Thursday afternoon kind of losing control of the kids, I read them the riot act and I went home, ran through my

mind what I was going to do. So I basically went back and read the book again, as it were, and remembered the experiences at Tekton and I thought 'I found myself shouting and screaming like Katrin was' and I was getting bloody aggravated and twisted up. I mean it's just uncomfortable, you know and I decided I didn't like it. And I thought 'remember what happened with that kid at Areyonga' so I thought 'just step back from it all' so I went into the classroom thinking to myself 'they will all be treated equally. If the behaviour is unacceptable they will get a warning'. And I've slightly modified their rules so they get a warning, the next step is their name on the board and then a cross and they're outside for 5 minutes so they sort of pushed a little bit ... and I said to them 'Push as hard as you like and you will see what happens. You will suffer the consequences. I have to. You see the rules up there? I have to apply the rules. I have no choice in that but you have a choice in terms of what you do. Anyway push as hard as you like and we'll see what happens.' So a couple did. And as I was teaching, it was a nice lesson. The kids seemed to enjoy what it was they had to do. So I didn't remind them about the rules or anything like that. So a kid misbehaved. 'Warning, Blake.' He looked up and 'Oh, okay.' So he misbehaved a bit further so his name went up on the board and it was just a case of 'Okay Blake, your name's on the board' and another kid would talk 'Warning, Hayley' and she looked up terribly surprised that it should happen and the further I went with it the quieter and the quieter the room became. And it was just that all of the comments were just simply incidental. It's a bit like saying, say if I was reading a story, for example, 'there's a big dark room and it was 'warning Hayley' and then just straight on with the same tone of voice, instead of stopping and getting all frustrated. So the kid went outside and I said 'up the back, get yourself a piece of scrap paper, something to lean on and a pencil so while you're outside you're going to write down what rule you've broken and what you're going to do to fix it. Okay, off you go.' Carried on. So he went out thinking 'gee, I've never seen this before.' So he went out and dutifully wrote it and came back in and handed it to me and I said 'great Blake, thanks for that. Grab a seat.' So there is that difference in her style, shouting and screaming a lot and I'd much prefer a quieter style."

By interview three, however, half way through the ATP, there had been a significant shift in Craig's attitude. In the previous interview, Craig had identified with and related positively to the children he had met. He had indicated a preference for a quieter management style than his teacher and had been effectively implementing his own style of classroom management.

Craig's frustration with his year 3 students was evident. "Their concentration span can be quite good, but for the most part it's bloody terrible. You can say things like 'You're always getting up, moving around' and I've got to tell them over and over and over again, I really have to condition them to do certain things so by simply standing up and saying to everybody 'I do not want you to get out of your chairs and come up to me and talk to me. You must stay where you are, put your hand up. Just because you've put your hand up that doesn't mean you can start talking straight away. You have to wait until I acknowledge you or recognise you and when I do, then you can start talking.' And while I'm actually saying something like that a hand will go up and someone will start bloody well talking. [I'd think] 'What are you some kind of dumb dog or something?' There's one kid in the class who I'm going to put on a contract next week. I'm sick to death of it and I'm going to tear his head off if Katrin doesn't before I do. Every few minutes it's 'Mr Green?' and he's got stories to tell, he doesn't have questions. [I'd think] 'What do I have to do with this little bastard to get him to sit down and shut up?' So it is hard from that point of view. I've got to stop and think to myself 'They are only 7, 8 years of age and that's probably pretty normal.' But it's frustrating none the less and that's why it's hard."

At this point I had become aware of switching away from my researcher's role to another self. My youngest child is in year 3 and I was suddenly a mother mentally telling Craig that 'This child is complimenting you with this sharing of his stories however frustrating and monotonous it may be for you.' I quickly resumed my researcher's role.

Control of the classroom, as evidenced by the silence and obedience of the children, seemed to have defined 'what works' for Craig and this had become the measure by which he judged

the effectiveness of what he did. In achieving this control, Craig modelled his actions on what he had observed and experienced as a student in the classroom himself. "I'm learning as I go how to generally get the class under control and as sad as it is and I don't necessarily believe in doing it but it's what works extremely well, is to kind of make an example of one of them. Not necessarily in a severe way, but to focus on the misbehaviour and then generally talk about it or simply, say I'm sitting down at the desk which is very rare, the kids get started on something, 'Fred, I want to see you' and they think 'What's going on there?' and that quiets them down and I don't really like giving a kid a dressing down in front of the others because I remember when I was a kid at school ... but as a form of classroom control it does work very well for the individual and for the rest of the class. So I'm just toying with that. I'll probably keep doing it. I had a situation where there was one kid. I justify it by thinking to myself 'well by telling this kid in front of everybody else they're going to learn as well what the unacceptable behaviour is.' I don't abuse the kids as such or try to belittle them in any way. I'll get very stern with them. One in particular who I remember. We were doing a bit of art and the [art folder] had to be covered in plastic and I was doing it. They weren't capable of doing it by themselves so I had them come up one at a time and I'd say 'One at a time. The next one I'll call, you can come up.' And one of them just couldn't get the message. I must have told him at least five times to sit down 'You will be next after so and so. When I have finished her's I will call you over.' And I thought 'How much clearer can I get than that?' So about five times [I had to tell him to wait his turn] and then at the end of the day [I said] 'If yours is covered put it in your big drawer. Those who's aren't covered and only those stand up' and all this crap. Lo and behold, just before the end of the day, I look on my desk and here's this kid's bloody folder again, because it should have been on another table, so I just grabbed it and I threw it in the bin."

Again, I struggled with my own baggage. I struggled as a mother and as a teacher who was appalled at such an action. I struggled as a researcher trying to control my own reactions so I

would not influence my participant's telling of his story. I do not know how well I succeeded. Later as I listened to the recording I could hear my voice becoming quieter and quieter at this point and I could hear the restraint in my tone; or was that just because I remembered so clearly my struggle at the time?

Craig had continued. "And he looked at it and his heart sank and face changed expression and bottom lip wasn't exactly quivering, so I just left it there. I didn't say anything for about five minutes. So I got this thing and said 'Do you know why I put this in the bin?' 'No.' So I went through this routine of why I put it in the bin and how many times I'd asked him to do what I wanted him to do. In the meantime someone was looking through the door and something inside said 'Murphy's law. This has got to be his mother.' But I didn't know that for sure. So I said to this kid 'You're proud of this aren't you?' and he said 'Yes I am.' And I said 'So you should be. What you've done is great work. But the reason I'm throwing it in the bin is because how many times did I ask you.' So I really drilled him. So I thought 'I'll keep going with this in the event that the others might learn from it.' So it came to a reasonably satisfactory conclusion. He went outside and his mother, and it was his mother, sort of glared at me and him and what's going on here? But the kid's actually been great ever since. He's been concentrating, doing what he should be doing and getting lots of verbal rewards as a result. So it's hard to say. Inside I'd prefer not to, but as an effective form of management it seems to work."

Looking back at the ATP in the fourth interview, Craig observed "I've discovered the kids are take, take, take, and there's no give, and their expectations of what they should get are really totally unrealistic. They're often quite difficult to discipline simply because the parents don't know how to discipline the kids and there is no discipline at home. So that would make it difficult as well. I'm certainly heaps more aware of the reality of the situation. There's still the element of romance there and there is still that magic that occurs, not as often as I would have liked it to have done so." In the final analysis, though, the best thing about ATP for

Craig was “the kids themselves and those really nice times with the kids. I was reading to a couple of special ed. kids, mainly to keep them quiet. Whenever I picked up a book and read to them, that was to keep their attention and they quite liked it. And as I was doing that the kids were listening and they’d come in and lean all over me and that sort of thing. So the kids and those kinds of moments.”

“The relating times?” I ventured.

“Yeah, very much so. Yeah, and that’s why those little sorts of situations have said to me it’s an absolute must to programme in some time for that kind of interaction with the kids. So that would be the best part. There’s nothing sort of really jumping out. It’s more moments, things that happen here and there. I’ve had a mother come down, which I thought was terrific, on the last day, just to say ‘Thanks. You’ve struck a chord with Luke. Where he doesn’t normally talk about teachers, he has started talking about you and he seems more interested in his work.’ So she just came down to say thanks. Another kid, Tamaro, a little black kid ! developed a lot of time for as time went by, simply on the basis he’s such a bright cheery kid and intelligent, but as poor as all buggery, and an unbelievable story teller, just magnificent, the expression he put in his voice was great. So we developed a particularly good relationship and on the last day, he obviously told his parents, ‘I’ve got to go down and see Mr Green and say goodbye.’ So there he was at the door waving tissues everywhere and obviously as sick as a dog with Mum and Dad there and saying ‘We just came down to say goodbye.’ ... At the actual time itself, my head was a million and one times saying ‘It’s finishing. I don’t believe it’s finishing.’ It was the last day and things were all over the joint, but the more I reflect on it, to me, that’s the sort of thing, to me, makes me want to stay in teaching. To have in one term one kid who has struck a chord with me, there’s been some sort of connection, is worth it and makes up for this other little turd, Mark. So there was that sort of thing. Just walking along and a kid would come up and just hold my hand for no damn reason and just walk and talk. But other than that, nothing sort of particularly startling. Oh

the principal said, one thing that she did say which I thought was absolutely terrific, she said 'There is a really lovely atmosphere in the classroom.' And I thought 'If nothing else, if the kids feel safe and comfortable and warm there then that's more important than any education they might have'."

### **'Chalk and talk'**

Craig experienced a conflict between what he had learned at university about the best way for children to learn and his own experience as a child-student. When I asked Craig in the interview before he began his ATP about how he would define learning, Craig's response reflected a tension between his own schooling experience and what he has been taught at university. "A lot of research that I've been made aware of, is proving that in fact group learning is not the best way, that essentially chalk and talk, so 'sit down, shut up and listen to what I am going to tell you' is currently the way that the kids are learning best." Craig had heard about this research on a current affairs programme which had been recently televised and through discussion with a friend. Craig's confusion became evident as he commented that this research "reflects very much the way that I was taught but with that in mind however, I don't think chalk and talk is the best way to go." While Craig did not think it was the best way to go because "through our tutorials, particularly in education, it seems to be a big push this group learning thing", at the same time he had observed that "in all of the education units where we've been asked to sit down and discuss things in groups, I reckon about 25% of what could come out of it actually comes out of it." This left Craig in a dilemma. "I have a bit of a chalk and talk approach ... And I do actually want to change from that. I guess I really believe that kids learn best from being shown the concept if it's new and then let them have a play with it."

Despite wanting to change, Craig is still not sure of how children learn best. He does recognise that “I am influenced by my past learning and by some recent discussion that suggests that they do learn best by chalk and talk.”

Half way through the ATP, Craig was still struggling with the tension. “I think my biggest problem in programming is the language programme because probably deep down I think it’s wrong the way they’re going about it ... There should be a bit more structure. But I could be wrong, but if it can be shown to me that the way [the university] go about it [is right ...].”

Craig is not convinced that the way he has been shown to teach is right. Again he recognises the influence of his own past experience. “That would be coming from when I was taught, not that I actually remember much about it, but I can certainly remember sitting down and having to spell words and write these things and maybe tick at the end of it all ... But I’m sure that I learned that all in primary school and I believe my literacy skills are actually better than the kids that are in university at the moment. So it does come from how I was taught. Although I don’t quite remember how I was taught. It was certainly different from what we are doing now. But if [the new way] works, fine, I don’t mind changing my mind ... [but] I’m saying to you how I fundamentally believe how language is being taught is wrong.”

By interview four, the week after the ATP had finished, Craig has become more resolute in his views. “My belief on chalk and talk is certainly stronger now than what it was before. Yeah, I’d say so ... I tried a few things, sort of sussing out my old Christian Brothers’ style of teaching belief system. Every now and again I thought ‘Oh bugger it. This group work just doesn’t work in my opinion.’ If I gave them a work sheet and ask them to write something out nothing would get done. So I just stood up there with a piece of paper and said ‘Right. Copy this down.’ Everyone was working together. The discipline was perfect. The kids seemed to quite enjoy it and it was nice and quiet and peaceful and we got a lot done ... But the group thing, getting three or four kids together ... as soon as they got in their groups it was a complete and utter bloody waste of time. Apart from the few, the non-Australians,



the Bosnians and Asians, they'd get on with it, discuss things with each other. But the Aussies saw it as a good opportunity to slacken off. While I'm more convinced that [chalk and talk] is the way to go and I hear from time to time that it appears teaching is going to head back in that direction because this lovely warm fuzzy way of learning apparently isn't working. We both know that literacy and numeracy skills are down compared with when we were young ... Yeah, so I think I should give them the information rather than have them try and find it out ... Science investigation, for example, has all these lovely groups and there's a manager and a director and a speaker and all this bloody stuff that works well in a pristine society but hardly works in this school where if someone does something to you the best way to sort that out is hurt them as much as you possibly can. So I completely restructured the science lessons and they still worked in groups but I said 'You will all do this now. When you've done that stop. You've got thirty seconds to go.' So we structured it because the noise and lack of control was horrendous and I thought 'I'm not putting myself through this.' so I controlled exactly what they did and they got a lot more done. They seemed to enjoy it a bit more too I think. And the ones who normally do the right thing seemed to be happier as well."

Craig's experience in the classroom had confirmed to him the value of the teaching style he was subject to himself, despite his own "very anti-authoritarian" attitude as a student. As a school student, Craig's behaviour and attitude indicated a resistance to the 'chalk and talk' style of teaching<sup>5</sup>, but for Craig, the teacher, 'chalk and talk' was the more effective, even if

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<sup>5</sup> Having read this chapter, Craig commented that he thought that it was not the style of teaching he had resisted but more the authoritarianism of the teachers, even more so in his high school years. To my mind, the 'chalk and talk' style of teaching and the authoritarianism of teachers are linked as in the example Craig gave of his restructured science lessons (previous paragraph).

boring, way to get children to learn. Having “maintained a course average that will allow me to do honours next year if I want to”, Craig knew the theory the university was espousing, but teaching experience in the classroom had confirmed to Craig that the way he was taught as a child was more effective.

### **The influence of Craig's past practicum experience**

As potent as the impact Craig's past schooling experience had been on his teaching practice, for me as a researcher, the impact of Craig's past practicum experience on his ATP experience was a more immediate dimension to deal with.

Generally, Craig had enjoyed his past practicums. “It's as if each teaching practice, bar one, was tailor made for me. It's almost like there was some pre-designed plan to show me these fantastic things that were going to make me into a decent teacher.”

The exception was Craig's last practicum, a remote desert community practicum, which he described as “a hell of an experience to say the least. A terrible personality conflict between me and the teacher and it was a bit of a shock to the system. It was a remote teaching school and I got out there, I was just really excited about being there. I'd sit there and a kid would crawl all over me covered from head to toe with scabies and snot running down their nose, all this sort of jazz. I'd squirm a bit. So I was a bit reluctant, I suppose, to intermingle with them although I thought I did quite a good job and one of my fellow prac students felt that I interacted with the kids more than she did. It was just on the odd occasion I'd squirm a bit because of all these diseases and filth and things. As time progressed the teacher that I had, who I think was probably a second year out, quite a good teacher, I had no problem with her teaching ability, but for some reason or other, she took a disliking to me ... I learned that I become reactive ... In hindsight I would have gone about the whole thing completely differently. I know the experience that I had there was definitely a case of victimisation,

there's no question about it. I did the wrong thing by [reacting] and not talking to the right people."

A large part of Craig's frustration with the situation was his perception of the lack of support from the university for student teachers in his situation. He felt strongly that student teachers were actively discouraged from taking their concerns to the Practicum Department staff and was unaware of other avenues in the university for dealing with crisis situations. "The only other thing that really upset me about that particular prac was, and this institution, is that at no stage was I consulted about what was going on with the practice. Ray Brush who is here, when we left the place he said 'How did it go?' so I spewed things out for about the next half hour and he gave me a sympathetic ear he said 'Unfortunately it happens. A lot of first year outs end up in situations like that and it's so terrible that they will often just simply leave the profession altogether' and I think it's terribly wrong, but I was and still am rather spewing really that at no stage was I sat down and asked what's going on, by the headmaster, the teacher herself, the supervisor who was out there at the time, and David Carew who was heading the whole thing. When we arrived back David said 'I'd like to talk to you. There's actually big problems at the school.' So I came in to see him. Basically his response was 'Well, you survived, you know, you passed' and I thought 'Well, shit, that's just not good enough.' And it's the same philosophy here with the prac department. They tell us 'Don't ring me up with a personality conflict. I don't want to hear about. Sit down and try and resolve the problem first. Don't come to me and tell me you hate the teacher. It just won't wash.' And I thought 'Thanks very much'."

Craig's experience with his last practicum teacher made him wary of his supervising teacher for ATP. "The teacher that I have, I believe, has the potential to be the same, but I'm still sort of smarting a bit from the last one. But in the event that that does occur, I'm much better equipped to handle it and I'm not going to get as reactive. I've virtually made up my mind that my teacher's going to be no help whatsoever, which I highly suspect is the case, and if

so well that's fine, that's her, I'll just have to do what I can and not get all shitty about it. The teacher that I have, it's very difficult to get a smile out of her although it has started to happen. And there has been some interesting little things occur so far, lack of her smiles for a start, but she does that with the students anyway. She is a completely different person to me, but I am thinking more than anything that will actually make the situation work. She's loud and aggressive. So as far as any feminine qualities that I like in females she doesn't have any of them. And she's got my area as far away as is physically possible to be in the room. So my sort of attitude is 'She's feeling a bit threatened' and I can understand that. So I'm extremely mindful of that and I'm going to do my best to make sure she feels like she's got control of the class. There's no reason to become pally with her. So my intention's to keep it purely professional."

After the first week of ATP, Craig's initial comments about his teacher were positive. "As far as my actual teacher is concerned, she's warming up. She's quite, she's not cold, but sort of indifferent really. She has made some positive comments and the more I think about the positive comments that she's made and the perhaps more constructive as opposed to the 'you've done really well' that sort of positive comment, but she's given me a free reign and when I consider that she has spent most of the time out of the class while I've been teaching, that's a huge compliment to me. Now if I was doing really badly there's no way she'd leave the room and she left me with the class for the whole afternoon. That was just a spin out. I loved it."

As the interview continued, however, a different picture began to emerge. "I'm still a little bit wary of the teacher. There have been no problems but the interaction between us isn't great. As I was saying before I think it's just the sort of person that she is ... I was actually very concerned with her on day one to the extent that I think she shouts and screams far too much and she's got a very loud voice which aggravates me regardless of whether it's a male or a female and she hardly ever smiles with the kids. But as the week's progressed, she seems to

be more relaxed with the kids, and smiling a lot more and having a bit of fun with them as well. But she's much harsher on the kids than I would be."

Later Craig commented "There's a bit of a hang over from the remote thing so that dropped my confidence enormously and made me very wary of teachers like that particular one and I see a bit coming out of the teacher I have as well so, yes, I'm nervous about hoping that she doesn't take some particular disliking for whatever reason that might be."

I commented that the last practicum had had a lasting impact on him. To which Craig responded "Quite a bad one to be perfectly honest. And more than likely that will stay with me and that has altered how I communicate with people. I'm being very careful about what I say and deliberately going about acting as professional as I possibly can and once I'm happy and have started to trust the people I'll relax more with respect to that. Yeah, I certainly would have preferred not to go through that experience." Further on, in discussing being observed in the classroom, Craig commented "I'm actually not that fearful of them, I think because of the degree of discomfort I have with Katrin, I've no qualms about the headmaster coming in or the deputy headmaster. They're really lovely people. I'll be quite relaxed with them and I think by comparison the supervisor will probably be the same." I was beginning to feel concerned about the feelings of discomfort Craig was experiencing with his teacher, and this concern increased after Craig shared some general comments from the teacher. "I think she wants out of it. So knowing those things that sort of helps explain her behaviour, but it does make me feel uncomfortable and that really is where all of my nervousness is coming from, is her. If she turns nasty I could be in all sorts of trouble and when I think about my past experience with someone turning nasty, I really don't want to go through that again. So a fair bit of anxiety is coming from that quarter and then just my feelings of inadequacy with programming and putting lessons together. Creative ideas and those sort of things. As I do each lesson I think 'why am I getting all tense about? It's okay. It was all right.' So that all relates a bit."

By this time, I was in turmoil. Craig had seemed tense when he arrived and his tension had seemed to increase as the interview had proceeded. Craig was obviously struggling with the similarities he perceived between his supervising teacher for ATP and the supervising teacher for his previous practicum and this appeared, to me, to be impacting on his ability to cope with all the usual tensions he, like most student teachers, was experiencing at the beginning of ATP<sup>6</sup>. I knew that, as far as he was concerned, the Practicum Department weren't interested in providing support for a student teacher struggling with these issues. His past practicum experience was, at best, coloring his view of his supervising teacher and affecting his ability to work with her. He may have been unlucky enough to have scored another less-than-satisfactory supervising teacher or maybe his life long aversion to getting a qualification was raising its head. I knew I was not a counsellor, but, unlike Craig, I knew there was support and counselling available for student teachers in his situation.

The question I faced was 'as a researcher, what do I do?'<sup>7</sup> My positivist-empirical-scientific self said 'this is your data. You don't influence your data. If he self-destructs, that's a part of your research. You don't intervene.' My more humane self said 'you can't stand by and watch a nice guy like this self-destruct! Let him know that he could talk it through with a counsellor.' Another self struggled with 'if I say something, will he find that even more

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<sup>6</sup> Craig commented, on reading this chapter, that at this stage he was also having very strong doubts about whether he was wanting to teach (a usual tension in the ATP?).

<sup>7</sup> Craig commented that my quietness at this stage had made the situation seem even worse to him and had made him feel even more anxious at the end of the interview. He thought that if I had suggested he talk with someone he would have probably responded "No, I'll get through this. I don't need someone" but he also said he may have asked me if I could suggest someone. In hindsight I would have served Craig and myself better if I had been more open about my concerns.

disconcerting? Will he think it's even worse than he thinks already because the researcher thinks he needs to see a counsellor?' How does one find an answer to these dilemmas in the 'hot action' of an interview situation? Silence won, but, over the following weeks, I struggled with having chosen silence. Would Craig survive to the third interview?

He did.

Although never close, Craig's relationship with his supervising teacher, Katrin, had survived the carry-over effect from his previous practicum. "I've got to please Katrin. But she's a hell of a lot easier to please than I think she is. So any sort of sense of that paranoia is all self inflicted. She has actually ended up being a great ally. Not that we chat much. I've asked her questions, I've asked her 'Am I failing?' and she says 'Don't be stupid', says things like that. And she leaves the room for most of the time and is quite happy with how I'm going ... We don't chat. We don't talk to each other at recess or lunch time. We don't talk before school, but she smiles quite nicely. But as far as getting on with her is concerned it's obviously there because she's said things like 'No, you're not failing' and 'That went well.' and all her written comments were good."

Apart from Katrin's reassurance, one particular incident seemed to prove to Craig that Katrin was an ally and not an enemy. "Apparently, well, I've been misquoted already at the school where I'm supposed to have said 'I get really pissed off when teachers come into my classroom.' I know I said it to someone, but I can't for the life of me think who, I've commented 'What a pain in the arse it is, all these bloody interruptions all the time. How does anything get done?' And it is phenomenal the interruptions. We are going to churn out these people who are supposed to go into the work force who don't know anything. There's this and that and the other thing and broadcasts and God knows what. Anyway, so that got converted from that to 'I get really pissed off with teachers who come into the classroom'. And as I said to Katrin "That's quite amazing because no teachers have ever been into my classroom'. Anyway nothing was further from the truth, but she certainly proved herself to

be an ally and through this we were obviously getting along when she said 'Look Craig, you really have to be careful what you say. You know you've been quoted as saying this.' And I said 'I didn't say that.' And she said 'Yeah, there are people here who are not what they seem to be. Be very, very careful what you say.' ... And she came up to me on the Monday and said 'Oh, I've been thinking about it on the weekend and I really wondered if I should have said to you what I did.' And I said 'I am that appreciative that you said that to me. I have this strange sense of humour where I use shock and contrast and it gets me into trouble. Its a family thing. I've grown up with it and I use it. No, you've done me a great service.' So through that I know she's an ally."

At the last interview, Craig recognised that the baggage he had carried into the ATP had been a big weight to overcome. "Yeah. To say the least, and even to the last day, I was ever cautious of Katrin and other teachers in the school for that matter, thinking to myself 'You never know when they might turn.' And towards the end of the prac, I think it was the second last week of the prac, we went on a zoo trip and I asked my brother to come along and he met my teacher and he said 'Shit,' he says 'I see what you mean.' I said 'Yeah, well, this is what I've had to put up with.' She was a friend and out to help me, but she was very indifferent as well. We ended up chatting and she would say things to me that if I was a nasty sort of character I could have got her into all sorts of trouble. But at the same time it was a bit odd. Yeah, quite a hard sort of character."



## CHAPTER 7

### FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Personal experience, the knowledge and experience a teacher has had communicated to them by others, and the personal values and ideals that they aspire to all contribute to making up that unique belief system, the practical theory, which guides the teacher's personal teaching practice (Handal & Lauvas, 1987, p. 9). Preservice or student teachers also bring to their teaching practice their own unique practical theory. While working with and supervising student teachers on their practicum, I had become intrigued by the changes in the student teachers as a result of their experience of their practicum, especially their extended practicum. How were student teachers learning about teaching while on their extended practicum? How was the extended practicum impacting on the student teachers' practical theories about teaching and how did the student teachers themselves interpret such changes? To answer these questions, I needed to 'get inside the student teachers' heads', to find some way to explore their beliefs and their understanding of their experiences. I chose to use narrative research because it seemed an appropriate method to use for this particular study and because of the growing interest by researchers in using stories and narratives to explore a teacher's beliefs and experiences (see, for example, Carter, 1993; Beattie, 1995; Casey, 1995; Clandinin, & Connelly, 1996).

This chapter presents the findings and recommendations that emerge from this study and then reflects on narrative research as a methodology. In closing my thesis, I write an open letter to student teachers, those for whom this work was originally intended.

The research questions which initially guided my study are:

- How do student teachers learn about teaching on their extended practicum, the Assistant Teacher Programme, locally known as the ATP?
- In what ways does the ATP impact on the practical theory of students?
- How does a student teacher's experience and interpretation of critical incidents in their ATP impact on their practical theory of teaching?
- To what factors do student teachers attribute changes in their practical theory?

The methodology for this study allowed for those issues which were of greatest concern to the student teachers to come to the fore. As a result, some conclusions arose which were not an initial focus of the research questions.

While my initial audience for this study was future student teachers facing the ATP, providing the Faculty of Education with information so that the ATP could be improved for the benefit of the student teachers' learning about teaching was an important consideration in the study. In the course of the study the participants made clear that there were important aspects of the ATP which needed to be addressed and a common sentiment which was expressed by the participants was the hope that this study would lead to an improvement in the ATP for future student teachers. Because of what the student teachers were sharing with me, I became aware of a need to shift my thinking to seeing the Faculty of Education as my primary audience. As a result of this shift, my final chapter is directed to the Faculty of Education as a primary audience. Nevertheless, future student teachers are still close to my heart and it is to them that I write my final comments.

What can be learned from the experiences of Jodie, Christina, John, Celine and Craig on their extended practicum?

## **Learning about teaching - critical incidents**

Part of learning from the experience of the ATP was learning from the challenging, the unexpected, and the unusual. Jodie, John and Christina were exposed to some of the broader issues surrounding teaching through situations they faced on their ATP. Jodie's exposure to special needs children in the year one class she had been allocated to, in the special needs class in which she taught on the Monday afternoon, and in the playground provided the impetus for Jodie to examine the complexity surrounding the issue of mainstreaming special needs children in the regular school and classroom. The struggle John had with his relationship with his supervising teacher exposed John to some of the difficulties and dilemmas associated with maintaining professional relationships in teaching. With her supervising teacher absent, Christina was challenged to draw from her own personal experience when the mother of one of her students and a child from the school died suddenly and tragically in the same week and Christina had to explain this to her class. Such situations are representative of the types of critical incidents that cause student teachers, and experienced teachers, to stop and examine both their teaching practice and the practical theories, which drive their teaching practice. Jodie, John and Christina did not emerge from their ATP experience with clear cut answers to the difficulties and dilemmas they encountered, but they had gained greater insight into some of the complexities and ambiguities surrounding issues which arise in the teaching profession.

Critical incidents and situations challenge us with the practical theory which lies behind teaching practice. Jodie, Christina and John were each confronted with a critical incident or situation that challenged and forced them to examine some of the broad issues which teaching professionals face. For Christina and John, the situations they were challenged by arose as a result of events or circumstances beyond their control. Jodie had been allocated to a school with a special needs unit, and each of the ATP student teachers allocated to the school had been assigned by the principal to a class different from their main class for one afternoon a

week. Jodie had not specialised in children with special needs but had, in the luck of the draw, been allocated to the special needs class.

What are the implications of this finding? Challenging situations were the ones that created the greater opportunity for learning about teaching for Christina, John and Jodie. While events and circumstances occur which are beyond the control of all involved in the practicum experience, some situations can be 'set up'. Jodie's experience was an example of how this could be done by the principal. Alternatively, student teachers could be proactive in choosing practicum placements that contrast with those school situations they have already experienced in their own schooling and in other practicums.

### **The impact of assessment**

As Jodie and Christina came to terms with and accepted that they would not be recommended for Outstanding, the focus of their teaching moved from being a performance for assessment to what the children themselves were actually learning. For Celine performing for the assessment continued to the very end of the ATP as she sought to gain an Outstanding mark. Although Celine was "annoyed and so angry because it's not about going out to impress someone on your ATP", nevertheless she stated "all your work you do is just for the assessment, whether you're going to get a good mark or not." There was not the clear switch to thinking about the learning of the children in the same way as occurred for Jodie and Christina. So, whereas Celine acts on her supervising teacher's recommendation to write a programme for the teacher's aide to teach the remedial children in order to enhance her assessment outcome, Christina, prompted by wanting to "help those kids who are falling behind", took the initiative and volunteered to do a programme for the ESL children in the class to help them progress and then taught the ESL children herself. For Christina and Jodie, moving beyond their concern with the assessment meant they were more conscious of thinking about the learning of the children and so more consciously able to test out and

confirm or change their practical theory. Being recommended for an Outstanding, Celine remained primarily focused on her performance in teaching rather than on the children's learning.

The stories of Jodie, Christina and Celine provide a challenge to the Faculty of Education. Barry and King (1989) have observed "in order to teach effectively, teachers need to know how pupils learn" (p. xii). Once assessment was sidelined, Jodie and Christina focused on the children and what to do to facilitate the learning of the children in their classes. This shift did not occur for Celine who, having been recommended for Outstanding, remained focused on her performance as a teacher and did not make a similar shift to focusing on the learning of the children.

The question of what the assessment is actually assessing needs to be considered by the Faculty of Education. Is the current assessment focusing on the technical skills of teaching, as demonstrated by a good performance, rather than on the learning of the student teacher which encompasses the ability to think reflectively and critically as well as the ability to perform? The present assessment system, in the cases of Celine, Jodie and Christina, graded the student teacher who produced a good performance for the assessment as Outstanding and the student teachers who focused on the learning going on in the classroom as Highly Competent. Is the current assessment encouraging student teachers to focus on technical skills to the exclusion of reflective practice? Does it encourage student teachers to fit into, rather than think about or criticise, current patterns and practices in education? The Faculty seems to have moved towards the more collaborative, reflective models of teacher education without making a similar shift with its assessment. To change the assessment to a more collaborative, reflective model will require the Faculty to reflect on and address the implications of such a move when the current government is emphasising competency based models of teaching practice. The Faculty will also need to reflect on the more local issues of the changing power relations such a move entails for all parties involved in the practicum.

The participants of this study found the opportunity to talk about their experiences in the non-assessment context of the interviews helpful. One participant commented in the early stages of one interview “well, I’m going to get it all off my chest. It’s like therapy here. Let me lie back” and finished the interview with “I feel much better now. Thank you doctor. Pay my \$80 now?” The only complaint about the interviewing process I received was from another participant who thought I “should have a couch” as the participant had appreciated the therapeutic value of the interviews! Perhaps such comments point to the need for student teachers to have someone outside the assessment context to talk with and ‘unpack’ their experiences. Providing opportunities which encourage a greater focus on the learning occurring in the classroom for both the student teacher and the children could be explored. Peer support groups and/or a change in focus of the university supervisor from assessor to mentor are possible ways for this to be achieved. Freeing up time during the period of the ATP for student teachers to meet in groups may be one way to take this further. Structuring time for reflection in the practicum conveys “the important message that student teachers are there to learn and think not just teach” (Dobbins, 1994, p. 352). Student teachers could meet with those of their peers allocated to the local area or return to the university to meet with their tutorial groups. University supervisors could then consult with student teachers, allowing time for debriefing and for discussion related to what they were learning. Such activities could help in the development and restructuring of the practical theories of the student teachers as well as providing opportunity for exploring the challenges posed as the student teachers’ past experience, prior knowledge and current context interact.

A student teacher could be responsible for producing a student portfolio in which they demonstrate their learning as a result of their practicum experience (see, for example, a study by Antonek, McCormick, & Donato, 1997, in which portfolios were used by two preservice teachers as a means of forming their identities as novice teachers). Christina could include her experiences and examples of her learning from such things as explaining the concepts of

death and dying to her class as a result of a parent and a child dying. Drawing on his experience, John could reflect on issues associated with professional relationships in the school context. Jodie could include her developing understanding of the issue of mainstreaming. Such an approach may encourage student teachers to actively place themselves in more challenging situations by encouraging them to look at their own experiences and needs and enabling them to plan their practicum experiences with these in mind. Dobbins (1994, p. 383) recommends encouraging student teachers to be more actively involved in their own learning while on the practicum. A student teacher wishing to eventually teach in a school servicing a socio-economically disadvantaged area could choose a variety of PSP schools but also a school in a high socio-economic area to gain a greater appreciation of the differences in the schools. The remote practicum provides for one variety of country experience for a student teacher considering country teaching as a preferred option. Perhaps this could be extended to include a practicum in a small country, a large regional town or the School of the Air. Developing a portfolio can give student teachers greater control over their own professional development. It also provides student teachers with a tool which they can use to display their learning to prospective employers, thus reducing some of the impact of assessment.

### **The baggage student teachers carry**

Craig's story raised the whole issue of the powerfulness of the past experience of a student teacher. As a mature age student, Craig brought a wide variety of experiences with him into his teacher education course. While one might think that such experience would broaden a student teacher's practical theory, in his final practicum, the ATP, Craig's own experiences as a student in school were more important in terms of their impact on his practical theory and his teaching practice than anything he had learned at university. Craig's story shows how strong the beliefs and practices of a student teacher can be and how strongly such beliefs filter

experience to confirm the pre-existing beliefs about teaching of the student teacher. While resistance to change is compounded if there is no viable alternative to one's current practice, Craig, an honours student, was able to talk about and practice alternatives he had learned while at university. Such experimentation did not change Craig's practical theory but acted as proof for Craig that the way he had been taught as a child was still the better alternative. It is paradoxical that, as a school student, Craig had resisted the very methods which he decided were most appropriate.

How much the example of the teaching and management style of Katrin, Craig's teacher, impacted on Craig's practical theory is difficult to determine from this study. We do know that the relationship with the supervising teacher and the university supervisor forms one means by which the practical theory is acquired (Beach & Pearson, 1996, p. 1). Craig came into the practicum with mixed feelings about his teaching style, preferring 'chalk and talk', thinking 'chalk and talk' was better than the university model and yet wanting to change. Despite wanting to change, Craig finished the practicum convinced that 'chalk and talk' was the best way to teach. Craig recognised the influence of his past experience as a student in a classroom in leading to this conclusion. He does not mention Katrin's teaching style as an influence. Craig does give a picture of Katrin's classroom management style and this does seem to have influenced Craig's classroom management style. Initially, Craig was not impressed by Katrin's classroom management style. In the first week, Craig, finding himself "shouting and screaming like Katrin was" and getting aggravated and twisted up as a result, introduced a quieter style of classroom management which worked well and with which he felt comfortable. He also told stories which highlighted "the beauty of the kids" and showed he identified with the more troublesome children. Halfway through the practicum, Craig showed a significant shift in attitude. He was giving children "a dressing down in front of the others", throwing their work in the bin, and thinking of them as "What are you some kind of dumb dog or something?" Was the shift a result of Craig being influenced by the management



style of the supervising teacher or was it a result of the stress of extended exposure to young students?

Craig's story also raises the problem of student teachers trying to deal with unresolved issues from their past experience with little external support<sup>8</sup>. In Craig's case, the unresolved issue of his unsatisfactory relationship with his supervising teacher on his previous practicum had a stressful impact for Craig in the initial weeks of the ATP, a period which is generally stressful enough for student teachers without carrying excess baggage along.

Craig's story makes clear the impact the past experience of student teachers can have on their learning during the practicum and on their practical theory. Research has shown that people tend to resist changing their beliefs and practice (Desforages, 1995). Even with an initial desire to teach differently and a knowledge of alternative methods, Craig had reverted to the models of teaching he had experienced as a school student.

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<sup>8</sup>Craig perceived a lack of support from the university in dealing with his negative experiences on his remote practicum. While such support does exist, Craig was unaware of what was available or how to access the support he needed to 'debrief' him after his experience. No help had been given to Craig by those he had spoken with. Craig had found no one who was prepared to listen effectively. Even I had failed him in the second interview by not suggesting he speak with one of the university counsellors. John also talked about wanting to discuss the situation he had found himself in with someone at the university. He had considered approaching one lecturer but had finally decided not to because "I had this vision that there would be this whole line of ATP students lined up outside [his] room" (John, Interview 3). Student teachers need to be aware of the counselling and support services available to them as well as the times when it is appropriate to access these.

## Reflections on narrative research as a methodology

Reflecting on my own understanding of narrative research (see Chapter 2), I wondered how to judge the successful use of narrative as a research methodology. Gray (1996) proposes four criteria:

Have I as the author gained some self-understanding? Has the narrative form as a methodology allowed both myself (the researcher) and the reader to capture and communicate aspects of human experience that may have been beyond the reach of more conventional research methods? Did the characters (participants) become Selves for the reader, and were the actions of these Selves consistent with their cultural environment? And finally, was the story sufficiently “Believable” to allow archetypal features to become visible, allowing the reader to make the transition from specific to general? (p. 48)

To some extent, I have used these criteria to frame my own response to the use of narrative research as a methodology for this study.

Self-understanding seems to be an understatement for the learning which I experienced during this study, an impact I attribute to using narrative research as a methodology. As a researcher I was using narrative to explore the beliefs and experiences of student teachers. By using narrative research, I was also exploring my own beliefs and experiences. The dilemmas I faced in Craig’s story hint at some of the struggles I experienced with my own values and ideals as a researcher and as a person. I found it interesting to observe the inter-relationship between my study and my personal life and the consequent changes in myself as a person and in my understanding of the world as they have integrated.

As well as a greater understanding of myself, I have gained a greater understanding of the research process. On the day I applied to enter the Master of Education programme at Edith Cowan University, I wrote down the personal aims and objectives I wished to achieve in completing this degree. One objective was ‘to continue to develop critical thinking skills in

order to view knowledge in new ways'. At that stage, I had not heard of narrative research. Yet in choosing narrative as my research methodology I have come to view knowledge in new ways and to have a greater appreciation of different ways of knowing.

The experience of being a student teacher on an extended practicum has changed since I was a student teacher. Through this study, I have gained a greater insight into what it is like to be a student teacher on an extended practicum today. When I did my initial teaching degree, every graduate was assured of a teaching position when they graduated. The extended practicum was an enjoyable highlight of the teacher education programme. Today, assessment for the extended practicum has a direct impact on their employment opportunities and, as this study has shown, an impact on the learning of the student teacher while on the practicum.

Through the recounting of the stories of student teachers on an extended practicum, the reader and I are able to modify and reconstruct our own knowledge based on their experience. Craig's first response to me after reading his chapter was "when the others read this, they will say 'shit, that sounds just like bloody Craig'." Later he said "I've learned more [from reading this]." He could see how his reactive side had emerged and commented that he would work at bringing out the softer side of his nature.

My intention was to open a window on the experience of being a student teacher. I wanted to construct my narrative so that the reader would identify with the participants and so gain an appreciation of what it is like to be a student teacher on an extended practicum. Did the participants become authentic people for the reader? Did the reader identify with the participants? Did the reader wonder how they would have explained death and dying to a class of year 2 children as they read Christina's story, or wonder how they would deal with the dilemma of not relating with their supervising teacher as they read John's story? Did Craig's story make the reader stop and realise how much their own past experience impacts on their beliefs about teaching? If only one story made the reader stop and think about how

they would have handled a situation themselves or made them reconsider their own beliefs about teaching, I think this study would have been successful.

The narratives were indicative of the types of experiences some student teachers encountered on an extended practicum. As I recounted some of the stories to significant others interested in my research they provoked interest and concern. The listener would make judgements and would often tell their own stories of incidents or situations of a similar nature to the ones I had shared. The contribution which such discussions about the student teachers has made to the resolve of academics aware of my study to try to get the assessment changed is one indication of the transition from the specific to the general. Comments from Celine also indicate the transition from specific to general. Celine commented that as she read her narratives her response had been “that’s just what it’s like” and thought that “student teachers would benefit from it, just to know others think the same things.”

According to Gray’s criteria, taken together, I believe that this study has proven to be a successful use of narrative as a research methodology. However, a significant part of my own understanding of narrative is its political nature, a criteria not addressed by Gray. In the face of the forces of authoritarianism and deprecation, narratives dare to announce that ‘we are’. Narratives have political agendas. By using narrative, I was able to make the political statements which, for me and for the participants, became an important part of this study. I had to reconstruct my relationship with the participants in the research. I chose to align myself with the student teachers and, through narrative, say that student teachers, although on the bottom of the power ladder, are there and their experiences are important. Through the telling of the student teachers’ narratives, something of the culture and identity of student teachers on an extended practicum can be known by those who are on the outside and who are often in a better position to make the changes needed to improve the situations of those at the lower end of power relations. By using narrative, I have attempted to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding teacher education and to suggest ways in which the Faculty

could improve practice for the benefit of student teachers on an extended practicum. I would therefore suggest that another criteria for judging the successful use of narrative as a research methodology is the question: Has the narrative exposed the political nature and complexity of the context and circumstances of the participants and in so doing challenged the power relations or structures which define and control them?

## Epilogue

Dear student teacher,

An extended practicum is a scary and exciting experience to prepare for. I find the experience of others invaluable in making sense of my own experiences and I find it reassuring to know that others have had similar reactions and responses to situations that are new to me. In doing this study, I wanted to share the experiences of student teachers as they proceeded through their extended practicum (the Assistant Teacher Programme, or ATP), so that you can learn from those who have 'gone before'. What can you learn from the experiences of Jodie, Christina, John, Celine and Craig?

Part of learning from the experience of the extended practicum for these student teachers was learning from the challenging, the unexpected and the unusual. Jodie was confronted with the issue of mainstreaming and dealing with special needs children in her class, in the playground and in their own class. Christina was confronted with having to explain to her class the unexpected and tragic deaths of the mother of one of her students and a child from the school without the support of her teacher or another member of the staff. John had to deal with the breakdown in communication between himself and his supervising teacher. Each of these situations became critical incidents for these students, causing them to examine their reactions and their teaching and to learn from their experiences. You are likely to be confronted with the challenging, the unexpected and the unusual, even if in only small ways. Take time to stop and reflect upon these types of events as they happen to you. You may also find it helpful to look carefully at the incidents in this thesis which faced Jodie, John and Christina for what they can tell you about yourself and your teaching.

Each of the participants in this study had to come to terms with their personal aims for their assessment. Only Celine had been recommended for and had received an Outstanding. Jodie,

John and Christina had been expected to be recommended for an Outstanding but were not. Craig was hoping for a pass and was both relieved and happy to receive a Competent. For Celine “from the beginning, Outstanding was never, I wasn’t going for Outstanding, I was going for Highly Competent”, and in the end she thought getting Outstanding was very much a case of “the luck of the draw.” Jodie’s advice was to “forget about the grade, just make the most of the experience” and Christina, in a similar vein advised “don’t strive for the mark because you never know what’s going to happen. Just strive for personal success. And to realise that this is what you want to do and have fun and try and enjoy it as much as you can because when you do, you just get so much more out of it.” John also would remind you that “the big picture is you being a great teacher, the best teacher you can be and ten weeks isn’t long enough time to make you that teacher and an Outstanding student teacher isn’t an Outstanding teacher. You still have to go on. You don’t stop there.”

The relationship you have with each of your practicum supervising teachers is important, but the relationship with your ATP supervising teacher is probably the most important because of the extended exposure to their teaching practice and because of the ramifications for your future employment opportunities. John’s and Jodie’s stories show that interpersonal problems and challenges can occur with the supervising teacher or with the university supervisor. John could have chosen to opt out of his placement and defer to another year with the hope of getting a more compatible teacher. He chose to stay and try to work through the difficulties he was experiencing. Jodie’s advice to future student teachers on an extended practicum was “know what you want from it and then be ... assertive”, advice given in the context of her frustration with the lack of feedback she received in her practicum. Jodie could reasonably expect her university supervisor to discuss her lessons with her and would have been quite reasonable in asking for more attention from her university supervisor or drawing the problem to the attention of the Practicum Department. On reflection, Jodie realised she

needed to be more assertive, a lesson she can take with her into her future teaching, but a lesson you can learn from her experience.

Craig's story raises the whole issue of what you will bring to your teaching and the use you will make of it in informing your teaching and who you are as a teacher. Your personal experience, the knowledge and experience you have had communicated to you by others, and the personal values and ideals that you aspire to all contribute to making up that unique belief system which guides your personal teaching practice.

As a mature age student, Craig brought a wide variety of experiences with him into his teacher education course. You might think that such experience would broaden one's practical theory and yet, in his extended practicum, Craig reverted to the model of teaching he had encountered as a school student despite the fact that his experience as a learner in that environment should have pointed him to a different way. Be aware of the impact of your past experiences and make a conscious effort to be more reflective about your experiences in order to gain more from your practicum. Exploring your past experiences by yourself using journal writing or forming a pair or small group with your peers are two ways to do this. Craig, Jodie, Celine and John had contact with each other throughout their extended practicum. They were able to provide each other with moral support as well as practical ideas and suggestions. Forming such a group can be invaluable to you for the same reasons. A group with student teachers who are allocated to the same or similar years as yourself may be particularly helpful.

In the last interview with each of the participants, I asked them what they would want to pass on from their own experience of an extended practicum to future student teachers. I have already mentioned Jodie's advice.



Craig's advice was very pragmatic:

I would be telling them ... find out as soon as they possibly can what year they're teaching, then collect as many ideas ... on activities for kids, collect as many resources as they possibly can during that time ... for art, start working on an idea for an excursion, start working on an idea for assembly ... start programming as soon as they possibly can, getting familiar with what it is they're going to be teaching the kids, and try to get as familiar with the resources in the school ...

Knowing where the resources were in the school and what was actually available was a common problem for all the student teachers in this study so make a point of asking your supervising teacher what is available in the school.

John's advice reflected his own ways of dealing with the difficult situation he faced:

get all the great comments that you get from your two week praes and have them all out on the ready. Just have them in an emergency box for when you get home from school one day and you need that ... don't lose sight of the big picture. Don't lose sight of what it's all about and what the ATP is ... You have to relax ... You have to socialise ... at least do something where you are interacting with some people, and other people who aren't in your ATP, who aren't students, who aren't doing ATP.

John found those things that worked as stress busters for himself as he faced an incompatible professional relationship. Be aware of the ways you can relieve some of the stress you are likely to face.

Although Christina found “the first four weeks were hell”, she did find that the situation did become a lot more manageable and her advice was:

if you put in the work in the first four weeks you don't have to do as much in the last few weeks. I mean those first four weeks were just so hard because you're getting used to everyday, but after that, after you've done your programmes because that's the hardest thing, ... then it gets heaps easier because you've done all the work and it's yours, it's your stuff,... I'd say it's hard. It's lots of work. But if you put in the work you'll get the rewards ... Be responsible for your own actions.

Knowing your personal goals, working within the constraints of your own personal situation, and dealing with stress were common themes in the advice each of the participants wanted to share with future ATP students. Celine summed up her advice as:

I would say 'Don't stress out about it. It isn't as bad, or mine wasn't as bad, as everyone thought it would be. Be organised. Accept all the advice and the criticism you can get.' I think 'don't stress out' would be the main thing ... You need to work and you need to see people ... work with the situation you're in. You can't harp on it and think 'I've got a horrible teacher and I've got this.' It will probably happen for a week or so, like the supervisor I got ... Do what you think is best for you. I suppose as well you have to work out what your goal is for the whole thing, whether it's survival ... You work out what your aim is.

You may be wondering what happened to Jodie, Christina, John, Celine and Craig. Jodie, Christina, Craig, and Celine, have decided to return to university to upgrade their qualification to a Bachelor of Education. Both Jodie and Christina have found part-time teaching positions. Craig and Celine have made themselves available for relief teaching while they study. John, despite his concerns about his assessment impacting on his employment opportunities, was offered and accepted a position teaching full time in a private school.

In your extended practicum you are likely to benefit by being pro-active. Take control of your ATP experience and make it work for you. Know what you want from the ATP. Learn from the unusual and unexpected incidents and situations that you may be confronted with. Keep the spectre of assessment in perspective. Be prepared to deal with stress. Be reflective about your past experience. Most of all, enjoy yourself and the process of becoming a better teacher.

Best wishes for a successful practicum.

Deborah

Labor Day, March, 1998.

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## Appendix 1

### A MODEL OF COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING RESULTING FROM EXPERIENCE

Despite the importance of teacher's practical theories to the process of teaching, little attention has been given to how changes in the practical theories of teachers occur or the consequences of these changes. Figure 2 is a model of cognitive restructuring resulting from experience which I have developed to elaborate a basic model by Huberman (1993, cited in Desforges, 1995, p. 389). A teacher has a practical theory which drives the actions or behaviour of the teacher. The teacher's action in the classroom generates data, some of which are new. If these data contain no unexpected observations, no restructuring occurs and existing schemata are enriched. If, however, some unexpected data are observed, the teacher makes a response. Chinn and Brewer (1993) suggest seven possible responses a teacher may make to unexpected observations. The teacher may choose to ignore, deny, rationalise, exclude as irrelevant, hold in abeyance, reinterpret in terms of their existing practical theory or take seriously the unexpected observations. The first six responses will lead to no restructuring occurring. For example, a teacher might have a practical theory which includes "All Aboriginal children are shy and awkward when speaking in public." In the course of a lesson, an Aboriginal child gives an articulate and reasoned response to an environmental issue raised by the teacher. The teacher may respond by thinking, "It's a one off. Noma hasn't said anything all year." thus excluding the unexpected data as irrelevant.

If taken seriously, the unexpected data cause the teacher to enter a state of disequilibrium. The teacher may respond by flight, simple assimilation, trivialisation or deep analysis. In the given example, the teacher might think, "Noma must have heard the kids next to her talking

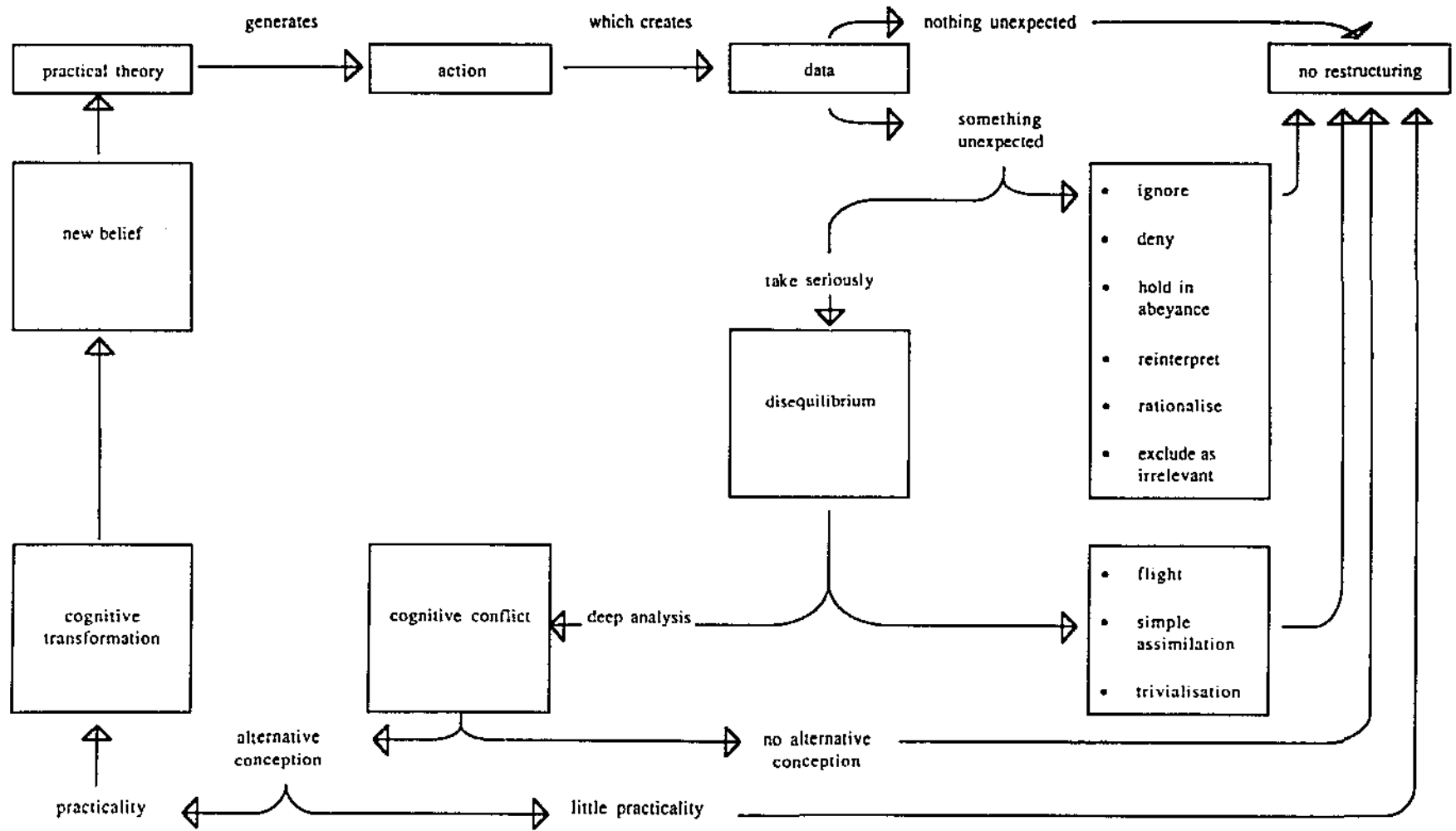


Figure 2. A model of cognitive restructuring resulting from experience.

about this” thus trivialising the unexpected data. No restructuring will occur as a result of the first three responses, however, the teacher might respond by deeply analysing the unexpected data thus entering a state of cognitive conflict. At this point, if no alternative conception presents itself, the cycle towards restructuring is broken and no restructuring will occur. If an alternative conception is present, but the teacher considers the alternative to lack practicality, the cycle is broken and no restructuring will occur. The teacher, in the given example, might think, “What happened with Noma shows Aboriginal children can express themselves in an articulate and reasoned manner in public when discussing environmental issues, but it is just not practical to talk about the environment all day.”

However, if the alternative conception is considered to be practical, the teacher progresses through cognitive transformation to a new belief which becomes a part of that teacher’s practical theory. In the given example, the teacher might think, “Aboriginal children are articulate and reasoned when involved in subjects they are knowledgeable in and feel passionate about.” Such thinking will influence the teacher’s future action in the classroom.

As can be seen, the links in the cycle of restructuring are fragile and the possibility of completing the cycle is weakened at several points. Studies show that teachers are likely to minimise unexpected observations by ignoring or absorbing them rather than restructuring their beliefs (Desforges, 1995). Considerable effort is needed to create the possibility of restructuring beliefs in the light of experience. Some of the variables I have observed impacting on the cycle of restructuring for student teachers during the practicum are the assessment based nature of the practicum as well as the interaction with the supervising teacher, the university supervisor and other school staff (see figure 3).

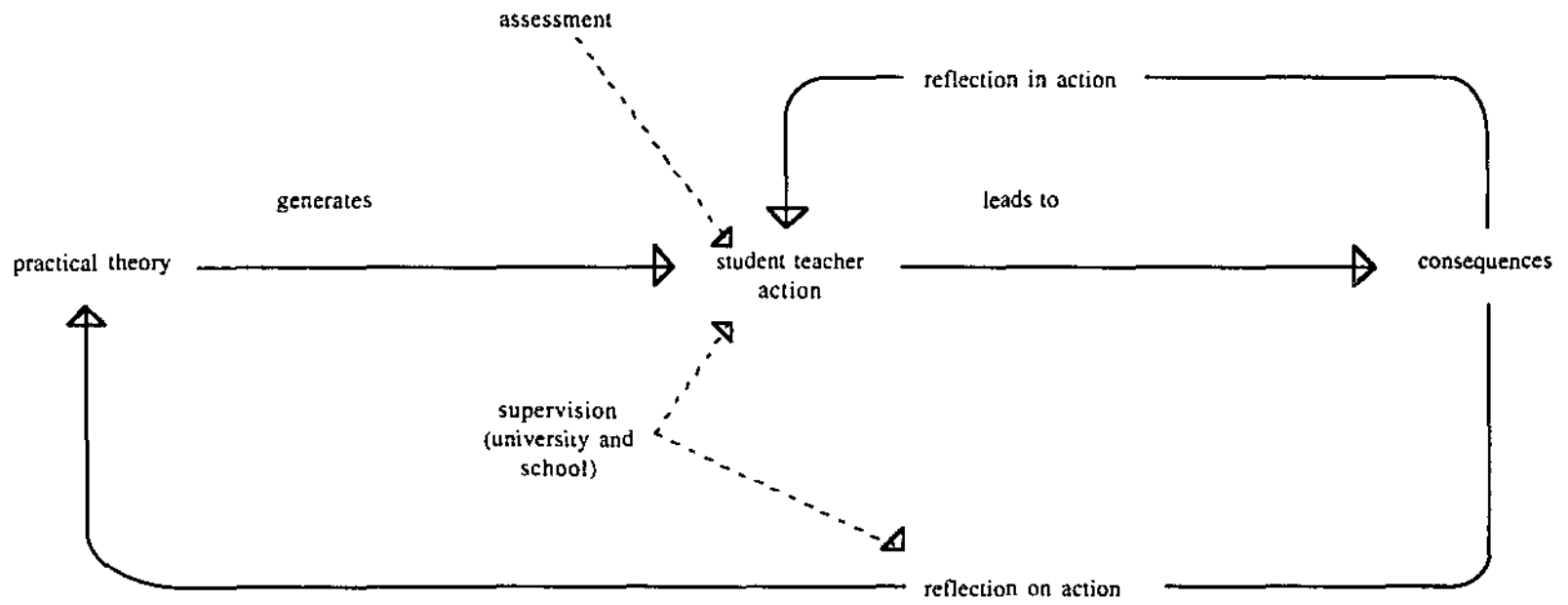


Figure 3. Some variables impacting on the student teacher.

## **Appendix 2: Permission letters**

### **Information for participation in research on student teachers' experience of the practicum.**

Dear student,

I am a Master of Education student studying at Edith Cowan University. As a part of my course requirements I am conducting research on the Student Teaching ATP Practicum program.

Student teachers and supervising staff approach the ATP with a variety of questions and concerns. The purpose of this study is to trace and describe five student teachers' experience of their ATP and to interpret this for a wider audience while still preserving the student teachers' voices, so that, both student teachers and supervisors will gain insight into the experience of being a student teacher on ATP.

As a part of this research I will need to interview student teachers about their practicum experience. Each participant will be interviewed four times at the following points

- prior to ATP
- at the end of the first week of ATP
- at the end of week 5 of ATP
- in the week after ATP finishes.

I expect each interview will be conducted at the university and will take about a half hour. Questions asked will relate to your expectations and experience of the ATP and your beliefs about teaching. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your perceptions of



the ATP and teaching. Information gathered in this research will not be used in any way to influence your assessment or evaluation

At no stage will you be identified. Your name will not be recorded, only gender and background experience relevant to the study. The results will be written up as a case study with a pseudonym used where appropriate.

You will be free to ask questions about any aspect of the research and you may withdraw at any time and without any negative consequences.

I will be happy to talk further with you if you have any queries or would like further information. My telephone number is xxx xxxx. I will usually be available Monday, Tuesday and Friday. You can ring any time, day or night, as the phone will switch to my voice mail if I am not there.

An alternative contact person at any stage of the research (e.g., if you have any concerns or would like further clarification) is my supervisor:

Dr Bridget Leggett

Director of Professional Practice

Edith Cowan University

Tel (xx) xxx xxxx Fax (xx) xxx xxxx.

Thank you.

Deborah Ingram

**Consent form for participation in research on student teachers' experience of the practicum.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name), having been informed about all aspects of the research project, agree to take part in the research into student teachers' experience of their Assistant Teacher Practicum being undertaken by Deborah Ingram under the supervision of Dr Bridget Leggett. I understand that I am free to ask questions about any aspect of the research. I have been informed that the information gathered will not be used in any way to influence my assessment or evaluation. I am aware that I can withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

Student signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Consent form for principals with student teachers participating in the research study.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name), have been informed that the student teacher \_\_\_\_\_, has agreed to take part in the research into student teachers' experience of their Assistant Teacher Practicum being undertaken by Deborah Ingram under the supervision of Dr Bridget Leggett. I have been informed that the information gathered will not be used in any way to influence the student teacher's assessment or evaluation. I am aware that the school, the staff, and the student teacher will not be identifiable in any material published.

I have no objection to the above student teacher participating in the study.

Principal's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Interview schedules

### Interview 1

Where appropriate I would probe with more specific questions such as:

Why do you remember this incident? What did you learn from it? What does it tell you about your belief system? Do you think you will do anything differently now? Why / why not?

- Can you tell me a bit about your own background. Where did you go to school? Why did you decide to go into teaching?
- Tell me about your past prac experiences. Has there been any particular event that has occurred that has influenced or changed how you think about teaching?
- Why do you remember this incident? What did you learn from it? What does it tell you about your belief system? Do you think you will do anything differently now? Why / why not?
- How are you feeling about the ATP?
- What do you expect from your ATP?
- What aspect of ATP are you looking forward to the most?
- What aspect of ATP are you not looking forward to?
- What do you think the role of your supervising teacher is?
- What do you think the role of the university supervisor is?
- Do you have any expectations of other school staff and their role in you ATP?

- How well do you think you have been prepared for ATP (the reality of classroom life) by your university course and prac experience?
- How would you define teaching? What metaphor would you use to describe being a teacher?
- How would you define learning? How would you know if someone has learned something?
- What do you think is the main purpose of ATP?

## **Interview 2**

Where appropriate I would probe with more specific questions such as:

Why do you remember this incident? What did you learn from it? What does it tell you about your belief system? Do you think you will do anything differently now? Why / why not?

- Tell me about your first week.
- Has it been what you have expected? In what ways?
- What has occurred that has been unexpected?
- What kinds of concerns have you had this week? How have you dealt with them or how do you expect to deal with them?
- What has been the best thing about this week?
- What has been the most difficult thing about this week?
- Has there been any particular event that has occurred that has influenced or changed how you think about teaching?
- Is the supervising teacher meeting your expectations? In what ways?
- Is the university supervisor meeting your expectations? In what ways?
- How have other school staff affected your week?
- How have the students affected your week?
- What would you say has been the most valuable thing you have learned this week?

### **Interview 3**

Initially I would have questions that arise as a result of the previous interview.

Where appropriate I would probe with more specific questions such as:

Why do you remember this incident? What did you learn from it? What does it tell you about your belief system? Do you think you will do anything differently now? Why / why not?

- Tell me about your ATP so far.
- Has it been what you have expected? In what ways?
- What has occurred that has been unexpected? How have you dealt with the unexpected?
- What kinds of concerns have you had over this half of ATP? Give a brief example of one of those concerns and your approach to it.
- What has been the best thing about ATP so far?
- What has been the most difficult thing about ATP so far?
- How would you define teaching? What metaphor would you use to describe being a teacher?
- How would you define learning? How would you know if someone has learned something?
- What has been the most useful thing you have learned about learners as a result of the ATP so far?
- What do you think is the relationship between teaching and learning?
- Has there been any particular event that has occurred that has influenced or changed how you think about teaching?

- Having experienced ATP so far do you still want to teach?
- If you were ever to leave teaching what do you think the reason would be?
- Is the supervising teacher meeting your expectations? In what ways?
- Is the university supervisor meeting your expectations? In what ways?
- How have other school staff affected your week?
- How have the students affected your week?
- What would you say has been the most valuable thing you have learned as a result of ATP so far?



## **Interview 4**

Where appropriate I would probe with more specific questions such as:

Why do you remember this incident? What did you learn from it? What does it tell you about your belief system? Do you think you will do anything differently now? Why / why not?

- Tell me about your ATP.
- I would have questions that arise as a result of the previous interview.
- Was the ATP what you had expected? In what ways?
- What occurred that was unexpected? How did you deal with the unexpected?
- What kinds of concerns did you have over this latter half of ATP? Give a brief example of one of those concerns and your approach to it.
- What has been the best thing about ATP?
- What has been the most difficult thing about ATP?
- How would you define teaching? What metaphor would you use to describe being a teacher?
- How would you define learning? How would you know if someone has learned something?
- What has been the most useful thing you have learned about learners as a result of the ATP?
- What do you think is the relationship between teaching and learning?
- Has there been any particular event that has occurred that has influenced or changed how you think about teaching?

- Having experienced ATP do you still want to teach?
- If you were ever to leave teaching what do you think the reason would be?
- Did the supervising teacher meet your expectations? In what ways?
- Did the university supervisor meet your expectations? In what ways?
- How did other school staff affected your ATP?
- How did the students affected your ATP?
- What would you say has been the most valuable thing you have learned as a result of ATP?
- What do you think was achieved by the ATP?
- What would you change about the ATP?
- What would you say to next year's third years as they face their ATP?

## **Interview (withdrawn)**

*To be used in the event of a participant withdrawing from the ATP*

Where appropriate I would probe with more specific questions such as:

Why do you remember this incident? What did you learn from it? What does it tell you about your belief system? Do you think you will do anything differently now? Why / why not?

- Tell me about your ATP.
- I would have questions that arise as a result of the previous interview.
- Was the ATP what you had expected? In what ways?
- What occurred that was unexpected? How did you deal with the unexpected?
- What kinds of concerns did you have? Give a brief example of one of those concerns and your approach to it.
- What has been the best thing about ATP?
- What has been the most difficult thing about ATP?
- How would you define teaching? What metaphor would you use to describe being a teacher?
- Why did you decide to withdraw?
- Was there any particular event that occurred that influenced or changed how you think about teaching?
- Having withdrawn from ATP do you still want to teach?
- Did the supervising teacher meet your expectations? In what ways? In what way, if any, did the supervising teacher affect your decision to withdraw?

- Did the university supervisor meet your expectations? In what ways? In what way, if any, did the university supervisor affect your decision to withdraw?
- How did other school staff affected your ATP? In what way, if any, did the other school staff affect your decision to withdraw?
- How did the students affected your ATP? In what way, if any, did the students affect your decision to withdraw?
- What would you say has been the most valuable thing you have learned as a result of ATP?
- What do you think was achieved by the ATP?
- What would you change about the ATP?
- What would you say to next years third years as they face their ATP?