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# Confronting the 'pedagogical immunity' of student teachers


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# Confronting the 'pedagogical immunity' of student teachers

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***Abstract***

*Student teachers enter teacher education programmes with preconceptions about the nature of teaching that have developed in the course of the years they spent in classrooms as learners. The initial phase of teacher education is a complex process in which many student teachers have to unlearn preconceptions they hold about the nature of teaching that would otherwise constrain their development in learning to teach. This is particularly relevant in the South African context, where the education system has recently undergone radical and multi-faceted transformation. Student teachers do not always get the opportunity to observe supervising teachers modelling conceptually deep, enquiry-based teaching during their Teaching Experience (TE) sessions, so it is sometimes difficult for them to acquire a concept of the type of teaching that university tutors expect. This makes learning to teach particularly complex and challenging. This article reflects on the pedagogical development of a student teacher, Amos, over the four-year period of his Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree. It shows how his pedagogical choices were often constrained by the conception he had held that teaching entails 'providing learners with correct information'. If teacher educators are to enable student teachers to become competent in the practice of organising systematic learning, it is imperative that teacher education programmes explicitly examine, challenge or deepen notions of teaching that student teachers bring with them to their initial teacher education.*

Key words: learning to teach, pedagogy, student teacher, teaching

## Introduction: Cementing or challenging misconceptions?

An abundance of literature suggests that a classroom-based practicum, or Teaching Experience (henceforth TE), has many purposes, including familiarising student teachers with the nature and complexity of classroom life and providing them with examples of classroom practice (Hammerness et al., 2005b; Darling-Hammond, 2006). TE also provides a context in which student teachers may integrate the theory they learned at university with the practice of the profession (Marais & Meier, 2004:228). The almost unanimous agreement on the role of TE as an invaluable part of teacher education is summed up by McNally et al. (1997:485), who assert that 'there are few certainties in initial teacher education – perhaps one of them is that student teachers need to have experience in teaching in a school'. Without a detailed understanding of how student teachers 'learn to teach', the full value of the TE component of teacher education programmes may not be adequately exploited. TE certainly has the potential to be an event during which student teachers meaningfully develop their teaching practice. However, such potential

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can be fully exploited only if university tutors and supervising teachers alike understand the processes involved in 'learning to teach', and if teacher education programmes are designed to support this development.

Notwithstanding the overwhelming support for the use of TE in pre-service teacher education programmes, concerns have been expressed that simply placing student teachers in classrooms during their initial teacher education programme does not necessarily lead them to develop effective teaching practice. While TE may be a 'process of self-discovery and reflection' for some student teachers, it can also be no more than an 'uncoordinated trial-and-error personal experience, an exercise in modelling and imitation; an accumulation of practical tips on class management, or a cementing of pre-existing conceptions and misconceptions' (Calderhead, 1988:78).

Lortie (1975:61) argues that student teachers differ from students training for any other profession because they have already spent a considerable amount of time in classrooms, which will be their future work environment. He maintains that experiences of schooling form the beginnings of their socialisation into the teaching profession, and describes their time as learners as an '*apprenticeship of observation*' during which they acquire various conceptions of the nature of teaching and learning through observing their own teachers. These deeplyrooted informal theories regarding teaching are based primarily on their own experiences as learners and times when they may have worked with children (Hammerness et al., 2005a). These informal notions of teaching may be particularly deeply entrenched because they have been 'assiduously and often emotionally acquired' through twelve to fifteen years of observing teaching practice (Shulman, 1987:119). While student teachers may have been exposed to the practices of outstanding teachers in the course of their schooling, they may nonetheless have developed problematic or narrow conceptions about the nature of teaching. These can hinder the pedagogical development of their own teaching practice (Kennedy, 1999; Joram & Gabriele, 1998).

During TE, student teachers are often assigned to proficient or expert supervising teachers, whose teaching performance is flexible and intuitive (Berliner, 1994:166). Such teaching may look effortless to an uninformed observer (such as a beginning student teacher), and so the professional thinking behind the actions and recognition of complex learner behaviour patterns, is often masked. The kinds of teacher knowledge, skills and professional commitments that allow a teacher to 'purposefully move a group of learners from one set of understandings to quite another' are often invisible from the learners' perspectives (Bransford et al., 2005a:1). Student teachers thus often fail to grasp all the complexities associated with teaching and learning, leading them to demonstrate what Hammerness et al. (2005a:375) refer to as the 'problem of complexity'. While student teachers may quickly learn to mimic their teachers, the limitations of their vantage point lead to superficial imitation, that is substantially different

from obtaining real insight into the 'private intentions, goals and reasoning behind decisions and post-lesson reflection that support teacher actions' (Lortie, 1975:62).

Calderhead (1988) argues that mere observation without reflective discussion may constitute wasted opportunities for teacher learning, as student teachers may not initially be able to make proper sense of the *busyness* occurring in the classroom. Consequently, when student teachers 'teach' by mimicking a teacher they observe or else remember from their own schooling, they are often replicating behaviour without a full understanding of the professional knowledge and thinking that informs teaching practice (Maynard & Furlong, 1995). By imitating the most easily observable part of teaching, student teachers reinforce the notion that teaching is easy, and that it simply involves the execution of a number of mechanical tasks. Under this misapprehension they adopt the superficial appearance of teaching actions, while the deeper pedagogical insights and understanding underpinning the actions remain rudimentary.

Preconceptions gleaned from their 'apprenticeship of observation' may lead student teachers to believe that teaching involves merely mechanical *transfer of information* from teacher to learner. Learning, correspondingly, may be misperceived as the memorisation of information imparted by the teacher (Tomlinson, 1995; Maynard & Furlong, 1993; Elliott & Calderhead, 1993). Student teachers thus typically tend to begin teaching by transferring information by means of 'lecturing' or 'telling'. Darling-Hammond (1997:13) suggests that such 'transmission teaching' involves straightforward classroom routines, and gives teachers a 'sense of their own accomplishment' when they have been able to 'get through' the content. Such student teachers concentrate more on what they are imparting than what their learners are learning.

As new learning is grounded on previously held beliefs and understanding, a 'strategically held misconception can interfere with significant amounts of later good teaching' (Shulman, 1999:12). The notions of teaching and learning acquired from their 'apprenticeships of observation' may serve as 'filters for making sense of the knowledge and experience they encounter' (Feimen-Nemser, 2001:1016). Shulman (1999) suggests that student teachers need to overcome this '*pedagogical immunity*' resultant from their 'apprenticeship of observation', before they can truly make the adjustment from being an 'expert learner' to a 'novice teacher'. While the conceptions of teaching that student teachers bring with them are regarded by some as problematic misconceptions, Darling-Hammond (2006:37) suggests that these conceptions could be regarded as prior knowledge that teacher education programmes should extend, challenge or deepen. A number of researchers recommend that initial teacher education programmes explicitly examine and challenge the multitude of concepts of teaching and learning that student teachers bring to their initial teacher education programmes (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hammerness et al., 2005b). Bransford et al.
(2005b:41), for example, assert that

> peoples' assumptions about learning can be considered to be tacit theories that affect their behaviour, but tacit theories typically remain unexamined. By making tacit theories explicit, people can think more critically about them. This allows us [as teacher educators] to improve upon ideas and assumptions that may be partially true, but far from complete.

Shulman (1987:119) believes teacher educators may be able to 'do some very powerful things if we can surface (sic.) the underlying preconceptions students have'. Teacher educators could use

student teachers' preconceptions as a springboard from which conceptual change can proceed, rather than to ignore their existence (Bransford et al., 2005b).

## 'Learning to teach' in South Africa

Some student teachers relate that many schools they visited during TE session 'were very structured, like their own high school'. Students in such schools adjusted easily, and 'had very little problem slotting in'. However, many student teachers 'learn to teach' in a 'vastly different context from the one in which they were schooled' (Robinson, 1999:192). Their understanding of what it means to teach has often been shaped by 12 years of passive or rote learning in a schooling system that 'leaves much to be desired' (Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999:131). For many student teachers their notions of teaching have been acquired during a school career dominated by rote learning, where critical thinking and controversial debate have been actively avoided. Learning, in many South African schools, tends to be 'more muscular than it is cognitive' with very little 'active processing of information' (Mattson & Harley, 2003:293). University tutors find that student teachers they observe often possess notions of teaching that either reflect or react against the type of schooling they experienced.

## Methodology for this study

This study forms part of a doctoral thesis investigating the developmental teaching patterns of a cohort of 66 student teachers enrolled for a B.Ed at the Wits School of Education between 2003 and 2006 (Rusznyak, 2008). Their conceptions of teaching and the changing ways in which they taught during their TE sessions were systematically studied over the four-year period of their degree. This article will focus specifically on the development of one student, Amos, whose case study offers particularly interesting insights into the relationship between students' conceptions of teaching and their practice of teaching. Unlike many others, Amos adjusted but never fundamentally reconstructed, his initial conceptions of what teaching entails. In this article I will consider his pedagogical development in light of what Shulman refers to as 'pedagogical immunity'. The challenges Amos faced during his TE sessions have been one factor that has led to the adoption of a new approach in introducing students to becoming a teacher at the Wits School of Education.

The data for this article were obtained through interviews with Amos at various points in his degree. Extracts were taken from TE-based reflective essays he wrote and from the observation reports written by his supervising teachers and university lecturers, the latter of whom had observed his teaching during his practicum sessions over the course of the four years. Quotes taken from these sources are rendered in italics.

## Introducing Amos

In his B.Ed, Amos specialised in the teaching of Grade 4–7 learners, he was expected to teach over a wide range of learning areas. His academic majors were history and geography. Amos chose to be a teacher because he regards himself as *a peoples' person* who *likes interacting with other*s. Both of his parents are teachers and knowledge is highly valued in his family. University

tutors recognised this quality in Amos, and mentioned his *engaging* and *likeable* personality, and that his *enthusiasm* and *positive attitude* helped him to *convey a sense of real interest* in the topics he taught. Without exception, the university tutors who observed Amos during TE recognised his potential to develop into a *high quality educator* who *has much to offer the teaching profession*. However, he held a particular notion of teaching that was a reaction against frustrations he experienced during his schooling. His conceptions of teaching, however, proved to be highly resistant to change, and this ultimately undermined the many positive aspects of his teaching potential.

As a learner Amos attended a school where he experienced *passive* learning. He described his teachers as being *like artificial intelligence who know everything and [may] not be challenged*. As someone with a broad general knowledge, Amos describes how frustrated he felt when his *teachers used 'old' information*, and he was not able *to challenge the teacher* in an authoritarian schooling system. These frustrations led him to develop a resilient conception of good teaching, namely, *providing correct information* to the learners. It will be shown that this belief formed the cornerstone of his teaching practice during the course of his pre-service teacher education programme.

As a student teacher Amos is described as being *passionate* about his teaching, and the university lecturers who observed him regularly commended his conceptual understanding of the topics he taught during TE. Amos, however, consistently employed a limited repertoire of teaching strategies; preferring a transmission-mode and teacher-led class discussions. Amos noticed a great difference when he compared the learning he experienced as a learner to the type of participative lessons he observed on TE. He asserts, *My way of learning [when I was a learner] was the worst one. Active learning is better*. However, it will be shown that while these views were expressed, they were not fully enacted during his teaching.

## Amos as a first-year B.Ed student

From his first experience in a school-based TE, Amos was eager to tell his learners what he considered *correct* information. This belief was initially manifested in his tendency to *teach theory from the definition* which his university tutor felt *did not facilitate [the learners'] understanding*. His university tutor described the introduction of his lesson (in which he required learners to look up the meaning of the word 'suffix' in a dictionary) as *alienating*. The university tutor commented, *hopefully Amos will be exposed to more effective methodology and more interesting approaches during the course of his studies*. His university tutor attempted to show Amos how to promote conceptual understanding, by advising him to *rather start with examples, which you have carefully selected – so that learners can tell YOU what the pattern and the rule is. Then you will have turned them into thinkers as well – and they will understand and remember better*. In another lesson Amos was advised to *introduce the concepts before the discussion – and [he would] find that a better quality of discussion emerges*. These suggestions were intended to provide Amos with various options of how his teaching could be restructured to promote a higher level of cognitive engagement from the learners during his lessons.

## Amos in his second year of study

In his second year Amos again dominated his lessons with *lengthy and drawn-out explanations*, and minimal levels of learner participation, prompting another university tutor to comment, *Make sure you involve all the learners*. This approach continued to be typical of the transmission-mode teaching strategies he used during his first year. In one of his lessons, for example, his university tutor suggested that Amos' teaching strategy stifled rather than promoted learning, saying, *Remember, you do not have to speak for a long time. Allow learners to speak. Your explanation was too long, that is why you could not get good responses from your learners*. In this comment she attempted to encourage him to use teaching strategies – not merely to impart information, but also to maximise learner participation, and promote meaningful engagement.

## Amos in his third year of study

During his third year, Amos returned to the school where he had matriculated, without the supervision of a university tutor. In a reflective essay Amos was highly critical of the teaching strategies used by his supervising teachers, saying, *learners sit as if they were listening to an elected official delivering a speech*, with the supervising teacher making no effort to *actively slot the learners in the lesson*. Thus there was a distinctive shift in the type of teaching strategies that Amos employed. He abandoned purely transmission-mode teaching. During this time, Amos's supervising teacher highly commended his use of *teacher-led discussion* and his ability *to manage the classes he taught*.

In the second TE session his university tutor noted, *You asked some good questions, however, many weren't participating – get them involved*. Once again, his university tutor urged him to move towards greater degrees of learner participation. His choice of teaching strategies precluded him from devising tasks for learners which would develop their conceptual grasp of the content.

## Amos reaches his fourth year

In his final year of study, Amos was observed by a lecturer who had taught him in his academic major and the associated teaching methodology courses. She acknowledged his *thirst for knowledge*, and described him as being *informed and informative* during his lessons. His supervising teacher too commended him for his *good general knowledge* and for *researching his topics thoroughly before presenting them to the learners*. His degree of subject knowledge was evidenced by comments like, *Good use of correct terminology. Learners had access to the new vocabulary in context*. Amos demonstrated passion for the subjects he taught. This passion, coupled with his *enjoyment of engaging in discussions, and explaining issues* resulted once again in him conducting lessons with a standard teacher-led discussion as his chosen strategy. His university tutor cautioned that although he *manages discussion well*, he should *beware of being the 'Leading Act' of the lesson all the time*. She recorded that *it was half way into the second period that [his] method changed from teacher-led discussion*. Ironically, he was teaching in exactly the same way that he previously criticised in other teachers.

Amos's supervising teacher repeated the concerns that his university tutors had expressed during his second and third years – that he *needs to decide which tasks are going to be assessed, so he can make provision for this while planning*. In assisting Amos, the university tutor prompted him to consider the purpose of his planning, asking *What are you getting learners to do for themselves, other than pool their existing knowledge*? Once again, both his university tutor and his supervising teacher were challenging his choice of teaching strategies in relation to their impact on his ability to construct a coherent learning process during his lessons. The role that Amos defined for himself, that of the sole provider of information, stifled his ability to envisage what indicators would reveal the degree of understanding attained by learners. In another lesson his university tutor again noted, *This is another lesson where I find you the centre of discussion. Some learners participate, others sit quietly and listen*. While Amos invited certain learners to participate in his discussion, his conception of teaching allowed him to believe that merely conducting a discussion adequately provides learners with *the information they need to know*. The university tutor urged Amos to move away from teacher-led discussion as his sole form of input, and to consider opportunities where he could *create initial activities for learners to analyse, explore, read, research*.

In a subsequent lesson Amos responded to his university tutor's comments by shifting from teacher-led discussion to group discussions and report-backs. However, his attempts to integrate this feedback revealed a superficial notion of what learner-centred teaching entails. The university tutor observed that *the learners worked in groups for a short time, which meant they had some information when asked for feedback, but [Amos] very quickly became the centre of a 'question-and-answer' session again*. His university tutor further clarified her concern, saying, *The point is not that 'learners discuss matters in groups', but they are given resources to explore and opportunities to contribute to the learning, whether individually, in pairs, in groups or whatever is appropriate to the learning outcome*. Through this comment, his university tutor attempted to motivate Amos to extend his learners by shifting his focus from his teaching to their learning. He was urged to use authentic resources and appropriate teaching strategies that promote conceptual understanding, rather than rely on those that simply give information, or keep learners busy.

With too much talking and too little learner activity, Amos found that learners became restless towards the end of his lessons. His university tutor recognised this slip in class control, and urged him to address it by using other teaching strategies, saying, *From learners' body language, there was not a lot of engagement. Don't despair about discipline – work on other teaching strategies*. This comment revealed the university tutor's perception that learner restlessness was a result of the design of his lesson, rather than a reflection of his ability to manage the classroom environment. By becoming more authoritarian with the learners, Amos would merely be addressing the symptoms, and not the fundamental cause of the problem. The data suggests that Amos's conceptions of what it means to teach largely determined his choice of teaching strategies. These, in turn, adversely affected his ability to manage the class of learners and sustain their interest for the entire lesson.

At the end of his first TE session Amos's supervising teacher concluded that *his teaching was not sufficiently learner-centred* for Grade 6 children. In his summative TE report his university

tutor commented, *It is regrettable that four years in the B.Ed [programme] has not been used to develop methodology for active learning through participative activities*. Amos was recognised as a student teacher with enormous potential, passion, commitment and a sound content knowledge. However, he did not realise this potential during the years of his undergraduate studies. For all Amos's limited repertoire of teaching strategies, his deep understanding of content and of classroom management ensured that some conceptually sound content was 'taught'. The levels of resultant *learning*, however, were considerably lower. Some learners did indeed engage with the content through his lectures and discussions, but many more were restless and inattentive.

This article has focused so far on the experiences of Amos as he learned to teach. However, there were a number of others who, in the fourth year of their B.Ed course, displayed a similarly superficial understanding of what it means to teach (Rusznyak, 2008). The resulting constrained quality of learning during their lessons was common to all. The discussion will examine systemic issues highlighted by concerns that limiting notions of teaching could persist despite four years of teacher education.



## Discussion

In this article I have shown how a particular student teacher's conception of teaching led to what Shulman calls 'pedagogical immunity', which rendered his university tutors' attempts at guidance largely ineffective. This, in turn, frustrated this particular student teacher, as he struggled to comprehend what was expected of him. While he believed that his lessons were learner-centred with active learning taking place, his university tutors and some of his supervising teachers did not believe that the strategies that he employed promoted conceptual understanding and meaningful engagement of the content knowledge he was required to teach.

Providing feedback on student teaching is a powerful tool in the TE courses in teacher education programmes. Student teachers are often duped into obtaining *false feedback,* presuming their teaching is effective when learners are quiet, paying attention and completing their work (Joram & Gabriele, 1998, p.188). When such student teachers assess the success of a lesson (within their framework of transmission learning and teaching within a well-managed classroom), they deem their lesson to have been a success, regardless of the quality of learning opportunities provided. Robinson (2000) suggests that the authoritarian legacy of schooling in South Africa has 'actively discouraged [teachers] from engaging in any form of dialogue about why they were doing what they were doing, what the alternatives might be in their teaching and how their interactions with learners and colleagues might be different' (ibid.:214). This may have 'severe implications for the depth of inquiry offered by [supervising] teachers to student teachers' during their TE sessions (ibid.:216). In the South African context, then, it is of utmost importance to provide student teachers with critical feedback through which their classroom experiences can be interpreted, so that they do not draw wrong conclusions from their early attempts at teaching. Grossman et al. (2005:205) acknowledge that although making errors is a part of the learning process, being able to learn from one's mistakes often requires that an experienced other provides the necessary feedback and perspective. The purpose of such feedback is to 'enhance teachers' own

understanding of their own actions – that is, their assumptions, their own reasoning and decisions, and their own [inventions] of new knowledge to fit unique and shifting classroom situations' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999:267). However, the evidence shows that Amos repeatedly received advice, guidance and challenging feedback from different university tutors during different TE sessions, but continued merely to transfer information to the learners in his classes. In such cases the provision of feedback is not always sufficient to challenge these student teachers into reconsidering their underlying assumptions about teaching and learning. Hammerness et al. (2005a:366) predict that 'if [their] initial understanding is not engaged, [they] may fail to grasp the new concepts and information, or [they] may learn them for the purposes of a test, but revert to [their] preconceptions outside the [campus]'.



The emphasis on preparing student teachers for their time in schools had always been devoted to helping them develop the survival skills they would need to cope. This included tips on classroom management, looking at the format of a lesson plan, and so on. However, experience with students like Amos suggests that a number of student teachers continued to teach at a level described by Maynard and Furlong (1995) as 'hitting the plateau'. At this level, student teachers have learnt to cope with managing a class, but go through the motions of routine lesson delivery without thoughtfully engaging with conceptualising a learning process. In Amos's case, rigorous feedback in response to his teaching was not enough to challenge him to reconsider his basic assumptions about the nature of teaching. It may have been that he was required to teach too much, too soon, without prior insight into the pedagogical reasoning that teachers undertake in thinking about their intentions for learning, and how they can provide learners with opportunities to work with resources to construct their own knowledge and understanding. The insights gained from the study of how student teachers like Amos struggle to discard their preconceptions of what it means to teach has prompted teacher educators at the Wits School of Education to consider afresh how student teachers could better be supported as they learn to teach. While subject-pecific methodology courses require that students think about effective ways of teaching various concepts and skills, their assumptions of what it means to teach may hinder their engagement with such courses.

In 2008, an introductory pedagogical course began with a rigorous exploration of the type of teaching students experienced during their own schooling, as well as their underlying beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning that they had constructed. The interrogation was done in various ways, with one strategy requiring student teachers to think of analogies for being a teacher, and to explain their choice of imagery. Student teachers had to respond to questions like, 'Being a teacher is a little like being a … because …'. The use of metaphors for teaching is increasingly being recognised as 'a promising means for analysis of teacher thinking and provides an avenue for self-exploration' (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). Metaphors of teaching are useful for indicating student teachers' basic pedagogical beliefs, as they are 'a complex matrix of the students' personal identification with teaching, their socialisation and in particular, their apprenticeships of observation' (Sugrue, 1996:163). The metaphors provide one method of exposing the assumptions student teachers bring into teacher education.

In light of Morrow's (2007:82) critique that teacher education programmes in South Africa tend to 'construe teaching and learning as generic activities, with scant reference to the *content* of what is being taught or learned', considerable time was spent examining the teacher's role as a

*knowledge worker* in examining, challenging, organising and extending the everyday knowledge that learners possess. To this end, student teachers analysed a large selection of textbook extracts dealing with topics related to their academic major subjects. In the process they had to identify the content knowledge, how that content knowledge had been presented for systematic learning, and the ways in which activities required learners to use and construct knowledge. This analysis aimed to set conceptual foundations for the development of what Shulman (1997) terms 'pedagogical content knowledge'. This type of analysis was intended to promote a conception of teaching as 'organising systematic learning' rather than simply giving learners the information they need (Morrow, 2007).

Previously, student teachers were required to teach within the first four months of beginning their B.Ed course. In the revised structure, student teachers spent their first session in the school with a structured observation assignment that required analysis of how supervising teachers work to mediate knowledge and organise learning systematically. They were required to discuss the teachers' intentions for the lesson prior to observing the teaching of the lesson. In this way student teachers had access to the pedagogical thinking that formed the basis for their teachers' classroom practice during the lessons they observed. This intervention highlights to student teachers that although expert teachers appear to conduct their lessons with ease, this fluidity is often the result of careful thought and planning. Such tasks counteract what Hammerness et al. (2005a:375) call the 'problem of complexity', in which student teachers perceive teaching to be a simple, straightforward exercise.

Drawing on Bernstein's work, Ensor (2000) suggests that some student teachers may acquire *rules of recognition* (of what may constitute good teaching practice) before they acquire *rules of realisation* (where they are able to replicate the practice they recognise as being privileged). Considering that Amos was able to recognise teacher-centred lessons in which little meaningful learning took place, perhaps videotaping his lessons, thus enabling him to watch himself teaching, would have been more effective in his case. This should be pursued with other students whose conceptions of teaching continue to inhibit their pedagogical development. If research confirms that this could provide an effective intervention for such students, it may be suggested that video be included as part of the equipment required for supervising teachers during TE – particularly where feedback alone seems ineffective.

It is interesting to notice the steps by which Amos's teaching progressed. First it shifted from transmission-mode to teacher-led discussions when he was required to write a reflective essay to accompany his teaching. In his fourth year he again shifted his teaching slightly, when he planned short group work tasks, although his implementation of the process was incomplete. It is noteworthy that at both these times, Amos was required by the university to conduct substantial amounts of written self-reflection, in addition to the feedback his university tutor and supervising teacher provided. Student teachers at the Wits School of Education are now required to keep a TE reflective journal as a matter of course. When university tutors observe their lessons, they are able to gauge a sense of the pedagogical reasoning of the students beyond their mere ability in the mechanics of delivering a lesson.

Although some student teachers express frustration in unsuccessful attempts using cooperative learning strategies in classes where rote learning is the norm, university tutors cannot assume the

majority of student teachers have ever observed the type of learner-centred teaching they are trying to promote. Nor can they assume that student teachers always observe such teaching during TE. The continuing prevalence of rote learning in many schools makes it particularly challenging to provide growing numbers of student teachers with a vision of teaching that differs significantly from the teaching which many of them may have experienced as learners.

## Conclusion

Committed, knowledgeable and passionate teachers like Amos are desperately needed by the South African schooling system. However, if the learning experiences they organise are limited, then they may perpetuate rather than relieve South Africa's educational crisis. Although in the course of his B.Ed Amos certainly improved his content knowledge as well as his ability to manage a classroom and relate to learners, his understanding of how his teaching enables learning remained rudimentary. With the current crisis in the supply of well-qualified teachers in South Africa, it is of the utmost importance that student teachers like Amos do not merely go on to replicate the mediocre teaching of which they are so critical.

This article has analysed the underlying reasons for Amos's 'pedagogical immunity' and how this inhibited the effectiveness of his teaching. As the conceptions of teaching that student teachers bring with them may ultimately constrain their development, a part of 'learning to teach' should therefore explicitly examine and interrogate notions of teaching and learning that student teachers may have acquired during their own schooling. Morrow (2007:69) argues that the core role of teacher education is to help student teachers 'become more competent in the practice of organising systematic learning'. I have argued that classroom-based TE programmes have the potential to be powerful interventions. However, merely placing student teachers in a school and hoping that somehow they will overcome their 'pedagogical immunity' and learn to teach by mimicking their supervising teachers is inadequate. A 'hit and miss' approach of this sort cannot be afforded in South Africa with the present critical shortage of quality teachers. Teacher education programmes should construct TE sessions to actively promote and support a developmental process of 'learning to teach'.

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