

Teaching reading: student teachers and the schooling context

Anne Hill, Christa Thornhill and Joy Alexander
Cape Peninsula University of Technology

INTRODUCTION

Teaching student teachers to teach children to read is a complex task in a convoluted field of teacher education. Perry and Power (2004) suggest that fieldwork is a useful mechanism for student teachers to construct practical knowledge in their process of learning to teach and Szabo, Scott and Yellin (2002) recommend that teacher educators should examine their teaching practices and the process of learning to teach. Furthermore, Szabo et al. (2002) highlight the need to develop the student teachers' understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. In this paper we tackle this challenge, which has inspired and liberated us as a collegial team with a common goal as teacher educators: to understand our professional field, and as language practitioners, to understand reading teacher education.

In this paper we explore the mechanism of the successive model of the teaching practicum (TP) and we report on the student teachers' understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in their reading teaching. The structure of our paper is threefold. It commences with a review of current TP models. The second direction is empirical. Data is presented from multiple focus group discussions of student teachers. The third direction of this paper is epistemological. It questions the nature the TP experience in developing perceptual and conceptual knowledge.

Our threefold structure converges on our argument that a four-year, successive model of TP with a grade-sequential design bodes well for student teachers' practical, perceptual and conceptual knowledge for their reading teaching but this design also holds potential for conceptual knowledge to be reflected on exclusively in relation to a particular grade-specific TP experience.

TEACHING PRACTICE MODELS

Munby and Russell (1998) state that the TP experience remains a constant as student teachers *continue to aver that this experience is the most influential and significant feature of their professional preparation.* (Haig and Ward 2004 in Ministry of Education, 2005) see TP as an opportunity for student teachers to develop creative and thoughtful approaches to teaching within a supportive and knowledgeable collaborative context. They do not agree that TP is the site where student teachers apply the theoretical approaches to teaching that have been advocated in their coursework. They are of the opinion that student teachers should take a critical and reflexive approach to their practice.

Haig and Ward (2004 in Ministry of Education, 2005) claim that initial teacher education is intended to foster the knowledge, dispositions, and skills required for student teachers *to look beyond the immediate, to search for meaning and to challenge the norm.* Authors like Feiman-Nemser and Remillard (1996: 79 in Perry and Power, 2004:125), on the other hand, believe that in teacher education there are several truths, as in many other fields, each based on different assumptions and beliefs. One of these is that conventional teacher education reflects a view of learning to teach as a two-step process of knowledge acquisition and application or transfer. In this epistemology the university provides theory, skills and knowledge through coursework, and the school provides the field setting where knowledge is applied. It is expected from the student teacher to integrate all of this. According to Vidović (2005) there are three models for attaining this integration:

- parallel,
- successive
- and modular models of TP.

The modular approach is followed in countries like Sweden and Finland (Vidović, 2005). Here the academic and the professional parts are organized in separate modules. By contrast, the parallel TP program at the Palacky University in the Czech Republic, for

example, organizes the academic and professional parts simultaneously: elements of integration are primarily organized between the theoretical and practical parts of the teacher education (Nezvalová, 2007). But in most cases of teacher education around the world the successive model is followed where TP follows on initial academic input.

The duration of the TP experience in the successive model varies widely and appears to be influenced by teaching level and sometimes the nature of the teacher education program. In New Zealand, for example, TP consists of several four- week sessions whereas in countries like Germany, France, Luxemburg, Belgium and Chinese Taipei (NCTAF, 1996 in Cobb, 1999) TP is characterized by one full- year internship. In the United States of America student teaching ranges from eight weeks to two full semesters with most programs averaging 12-15 weeks. In many cases TP follows coursework near the end of the teacher education program (Cobb, 1999).

TEACHING PRACTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa the duration of TP is determined by the *National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa* (2006:14). According to this document a “four-year Bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed.), which includes the equivalent of one full-time year of supervised TP experience in schools, is the standard qualification for students wishing to teach in any learning area, subject and phase.” These B. Ed. programs, focusing on the Foundation Phase (grades R – 3), Intermediate Phase (grades 4 - 6), Senior Phase (grades 7 – 9) and Further Education and Training Band (grades 10 – 12) are offered by a number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa. These HEIs include traditional academic universities as well as newly established Universities of Technology.

The implementation of this one-year TP differs considerably from institution to institution in South Africa. In 2005 the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education (*A National Framework for Teacher Education in South Africa*) suggested the three plus one (3 + 1) year model which recommended a three year B. Ed. (360 National

Qualification Framework credits) and an Advanced Diploma in Education: Induction (120 National Qualification Framework credits).

Several members of the Deans of Education Forum in South Africa indicated potential problems with the proposed replacement of the existing four- year integrated B. Ed degree with the above- mentioned new qualifications model. As a response, Professor Maureen Robinson, the Dean of Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), was asked to compile a discussion document on this matter (Robinson, 2005). Robinson's discussion document highlighted arguments both in favour of, and against the implementation of the 3 + 1 model.

Some of the arguments in favour of the 3 + 1 model were:

- In the South African context there are strong reasons to argue that anyone who intends to become a teacher needs a definitive break away from the schooling environment before they return to it as a novice teacher.
- Traditional TP at many institutions is artificial, concentrating mostly on the preparation and delivery of isolated lessons and an ambiguity about the relationship between the student teachers and the regular staff of the school.
- Being placed in schools on a temporary basis provides little opportunity for the student teachers to develop their teacher-identity or to become involved in the work of the school beyond what goes on in the classroom.
- “Supervision” by both the HEI supervisor (in many cases a person contracted by the HEI to do this work) and “mentorship” by mentor teachers is often perfunctory. In many cases novice teachers are often left to find their own way by untutored experience.
- An induction year provides the opportunity for more concentrated focus on the student's development of identity as a teacher.
- It provides greater opportunity for the development of capacity for skilled performance in situated contexts, under guidance of a member of the teaching profession

- Joint responsibility of the HEI and the school will generate productive relationship between two dimensions of professional education.

Robinson's arguments against the 3 + 1 model were:

- A model where TP is fully integrated across a number of years creates far greater opportunities for student teachers to combine professional and academic learning.
- The danger exists that the 3 + 1 model will collapse TP into one large exit block and thereby reducing opportunities for integrated learning.
- The effectiveness of induction depends hugely on the simultaneous preparation of school-based mentors.
- The current four year B. Ed. allows for TP to take place over an extended period of time. This facilitates an ongoing relationship with schools and greater opportunity for student teacher development.
- A full school-based induction year will diminish opportunity for examining practice in the light of theory.
- A year in one school provides no opportunity for students to be exposed to a variety of diverse contexts of schooling.
- It is a sweeping generalization to say that current teaching practice conducted by HEIs is 'bad'. Good practices within the existing model exist and can be identified and extended.
- No research has been cited to support an argument that this model provides 'better' teachers.
- There is no convincing reason why a new qualification within an unchanged educational environment will improve practice. A new structure, in itself, is unlikely to make a difference to overall quality.

In the discussion document the financial, organizational and system arguments for and against the 3 + 1 model were also made. The recommendations aimed to avoid disruption of the existing qualifications framework, and to provide a clearer role definition for HEIs, schools and student teachers:

- Maintain the existing four-year professional B. Ed degree.
- Continue to include TP as a component of all four years of the B. Ed.
- Encourage institutions to establish the fourth year of the B. Ed as primarily school-based, as long as the following conditions are met:
 1. The establishment of clear roles and responsibilities of the HEI, the school and the student teacher.
 2. The provision of a stipend to students, possibly through the mechanisms of the Education, Training and Development Practices-Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP - SETA).
 3. Establish mentor teachers as a career option within the category of senior teachers.

TEACHING PRACTICE AT CPUT

At our university (CPUT) we follow the successive TP model. All the student teachers in our four-year Bachelor of Education: Foundation Phase (B. Ed: FP) program do their TP in two four- week sessions each year. The first session is done in April and in July of that year they return to the same schooling context. By the end of the four years they would have experienced teaching and learning in all the foundation phase grades, in diverse schooling contexts that range from well-resourced schools to under-resourced schools, mainstream schools and special needs schools. The TP is designed for the student teachers in a particular year group to teach in a specific grade, starting with the youngest school grade in their first year of B. Ed. Table 1 below illustrates this grade-sequential design of our TP over the four years:

Table 1: Grade-sequential TP design

Year Group	Foundation Phase Grade	Type of school	Contextual features
First year	Reception	Mainstream	Largely ‘comfortable’ teaching conditions
Second year	One	Mainstream	
Third year	<i>Two</i> or Three	Mainstream	Largely over-crowded and under-resourced
Fourth year	Two or <i>Three</i>	Mainstream and special needs	Largely comfortable teaching conditions

This grade-sequenced TP design holds potential to assist student teachers to perceive a stronger awareness of chronological learning progression and consequently a stronger perception of progressive grade-specific teaching content. Mindful of the fact that children of the same chronological age do not necessarily demonstrate the same scholastic outcomes within a specific grade per se, or within a specific grade across different schooling contexts, the student teachers come to experience the issue of scholastic diversity. These are some of the advantages of this grade-sequential TP design, particularly as it pertains to teaching reading in a higher school grade each year, and in diverse schooling contexts. But we consider later in this paper that this grade-sequential practicum design could be inhibiting for student teachers who tend to reflect on conceptual knowledge exclusively in relation to the particular grade in which they engaged with elements of the concepts. Ironically, this grade-sequential TP design facilitates a stronger perception of chronological learning progression for student teachers but it could impede their conceptual learning progression if they connect their experiences to the grade as opposed to the concepts that they teach.

In addition to TP, the second year and third year student teachers do weekly micro-teaching at schools that are in close proximity to the university. The grade for micro-teaching is aligned with the grade for TP. In micro-teaching the student teachers experience reading teaching (as well as other subjects) and learning situations, they reflect on them under the guidance of the reading teacher educator (and other subject teacher educators) and they develop their own insights into teaching reading through the interaction between personal reflection and theoretical notions offered by the reading teacher educator. But the realities of TP are different to micro-teaching as Barone, Berliner, Blanchard, Casanova and McGowan (1996) state: large enrollments and limited time for teacher educators to visit student teachers during their TP are inhibiting factors.

Despite the challenges highlighted by Baronne et al., Munby and Russell (1998) suggest that teacher education should begin with school experience for student teachers. They argue that this will effectively challenge the stereotypical view that we can only act by first being told. These authors state that in the hope of establishing the healthy interaction

of theory and practice required by professional teacher action, we must challenge the assumed priority of theory over practice. For teacher educators this is not an easy endeavour since teacher educators by their very professional nature are immersed in theory.

STUDENT TEACHERS: TEACHING CHILDREN TO READ

Calderhead (1989) emphasizes that teacher development is conceptualized as an ongoing process of experiencing practical teaching and learning situations, reflecting on them under the guidance of an expert, and developing one's own insights into teaching through the interaction between personal reflection and theoretical notions offered by the expert. The knowledge base for teaching reading, both theoretic and practical is *hidden, extensive and complex* (Moats, 1999). Teacher education must respond to this by teaching pre-service teachers to make sense of this hidden, extensive, complex knowledge base.

While it is not the purpose of this paper to pay attention to the content of emergent reading, it is useful to succinctly show that learning to read is not easy for most children and consequently, teaching student teachers to teach reading is an exciting but daunting undertaking for teacher educators and student teachers alike. The content of learning to teach reading must include, amongst others, an understanding of the basic psychological processes in reading, how children develop reading skill, how good readers differ from poor readers, the complexity of the spoken and written form of language and the range of effective reading instruction approaches (Moats, 1999). Although surrounding children with books will enhance reading development, a *literature rich environment* is not sufficient for learning to read (Moats, 1999). Neither will exposure to print ordinarily be sufficient for learning to spell, unless organized practice is provided.

For optimum outcomes, the teacher must instruct most children directly, systematically, and explicitly to decode words in print, all the while keeping in mind the ultimate purpose of reading, which is to learn, enjoy, and understand. Moreover, to accommodate children's diverse scholastic and linguistic needs, the teacher must assess children and

modify instruction to individuals, interpret errors, give corrective feedback, select examples to illustrate concepts, explain new ideas in several ways, and connect linguistic symbols with “real” reading and writing (Moats, 1999). And all of this, in turn, becomes the endeavor for student teachers to successfully learn to manage these complexities during TP, along with the theory offered successively at our university. Our empirical data provides evidence of the complexities of student teachers’ understanding of reading teaching.

Methodology

In the process of gathering data for ¹SAIDE’s Project 16, which investigated the complexities in teaching student teachers to teach reading, we conducted a series of interviews with student focus groups at each level of the four-year B. Ed: FP program. The participants were selected according to their availability after the end of year examinations in 2006. Participation was voluntary. Their responses were spontaneous; they were not briefed on the questions beforehand.

In the course of compiling the research report for Project 16, we noticed interesting differences in patterns of responses that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. We decided to look more closely at the interviews as discursive phenomena in their own right, rather than simply as data collection techniques, to try to identify and understand the nature of the differences, given that all the students were asked similar questions in a framework informed by the same issues.

Conversation Analysis (CA) was chosen as an analytical tool because of its inductive properties and potential to be relatively free of ideological preconceptions that might limit findings. CA is a ‘bottom-up’ rather than ‘top-down’ approach to analysis (ten Have 1999, 2006). It maps the processes that participants in a group conversation use to negotiate shared understandings in a discussion. These ways of understanding and of displaying the understanding become the phenomena that are examined, rather than the content of the discussion (Garfunkel 1986: 321; Segerdahl 1998: 280 in Holt 2003: 227).

¹ South African Institute for Distance Education is funded by the Netherlands Embassy.

The analyst notes interesting features of the conversations and identifies focus lines, or patterns, which can be elaborated (Arminen 1999: 256).

In critiquing claims made on behalf of CA, Segerdahl (1998: 322) makes a plea for an undogmatic approach to conversation analysis. He suggests *mapping out characteristic features of conversations...that might prove useful in the treatment of practical problems*. Development of an effective reading teaching curriculum is our practical problem that we believe can be illuminated by applying CA principles to examining the student teachers' utterances.

The salient characteristic of conversation for the observer-analyst is 'turn-taking'. Turn-taking reveals the participants' reliance on exercising their group membership for voice, versus the degree of personal agency and coherent thought they display in order to express shared ownership of the communication. The nature of the operation of intersubjectivity in the group therefore may signal deeper processes, at different levels, of maturing individuation and metacognition that are supporting the conversation. These levels of individuated cognition can possibly be read as markers of the participants' internalized integration of personal agency and professional knowledge. If a sense of agency is an important signifier of the development of a professional teaching identity, then signs of its emergence in student teachers' spontaneous responses would be indicators of progression in their development.

We cannot make any generalisable claims from this analysis because this is the first batch of cohorts that have been examined in this way. However, by closely scrutinizing what is happening in this particular instance, we hope to open space for useful future comparisons. The insights gained from this analysis could have a bearing on curriculum design elements of the reading teaching curriculum, especially the role of TP.

Findings

The presentation of our analysis that follows is largely a commentary based on the turn-taking features of the interviews. Unfortunately the scope of this paper does not permit a detailed, illustrative presentation of the data.

Analysis of the first year group of six student teachers produced little evidence of individuated integration of knowledge. Agency was directed towards proving their close adherence to ‘official’ sources of authority and knowledge. They were displaying random bytes of information and recollections of classroom interactions to the interviewer rather than prompting each other to arrive at shared knowledge. The following sample of the student teachers’ responses to questions about reading theories illustrates our analysis:

*Vygotsky **should** be taught...we all **had** to talk ...like **Ma’am** said...* [referring to the reading teacher educator]

In summary, although the first year student teachers’ participation was spontaneous and lively, in order to answer questions they displayed more dependence on social positioning within the group and on the authority figures in the background than on their own evaluation.

The frequency of turn-taking was considerably less among the second year group than among the first years. Their participation was collaborative rather than competitive. They did not all feel a need to respond to every question. There was more silence as they seemed to be prepared to allow one response to represent the contribution of the whole group. While acknowledging that the smaller size of this group (three students) could have influenced the dynamics, it is noteworthy that when they did respond, they tended to prompt each other to build focussed consensus around the most appropriate response to the interviewer’s question.

The second year group tended to listen and scaffold for each other in their turn-taking. They appeared to display a more developed awareness of a collegial identity than the first year group. In the following sequence they respond to a question related to children’s literature. Each bullet denotes a different student teacher’s utterance:

- *Oh goodness! Too many. I can’t even think. We’ve gone from books with morals and values to humour to sort of (how would one put it) fables, drama, fairytales. I don’t know what you call it but those books which*

I've come across with different topics of interest for children like eczema and dyslexia, chickenpox and ADHD.

- *Non-fiction.*
- *Yes. Non-fiction books for children – basically relating real life problems that you might find in school or at home, in a story which is friendly, using animal characters, that kind of thing. So we've pretty much done them all.*

In addition, this group's responses to the questions to do with practical strategies were more elaborated than questions probing theoretical knowledge and understanding. Responses to theoretical questions were fairly cryptic and dismissive in tone. This suggests that these second year students' epistemic integration of theory and practice was weak. They displayed insecurity when asked to evaluate theory and frequently steered the discussion back to personal experience of practical strategies. The focus of their attention was on what was happening in the classroom, not why it was happening.

The group of four third year student teachers took a more considered approach to answering questions than the first and second years did. They displayed a tendency to negotiate a shared understanding of the questions before constructing responses together. There was a marked advance, compared with the previous two groups, in the degree of both collegial awareness and cohesion of discourse. They used metacognitive language confidently and appropriately to explain the rationales supporting various strategies. They displayed a more integrated understanding of applied theory in their appropriate use of terminology than the first and second year groups did. In the following sequence the third year student teachers are responding to a question about reading theories that they had covered in their three years of reading teacher education:

- *Theories...um*

[pause]

- *Umm*
- *We should have gone through our notes before*

[laughter]

- *Well...*
- *So like the top-down, bottom-up approach - okay? So ...Top-down is like you get the meaning first*
- *So you get the gist of the story and then you go into the grammar and tense*
- *Yes, because they read the story, they select the story and then read it*
- *Ja ja*
- *So this is what happens – okay – now let's look more closely*
- *Bottom-up you start looking at the words, sounds and that sort of thing.*

This sequence illustrates that the group of third year students also displayed strong collegial behaviour, supporting and prompting each other good-humouredly without any sense of competing for the approval of the interviewer. A shared professional identity had emerged; the cohesion of the discourse was purposefully and collaboratively constructed and with some prompting from the interviewer, a focussed reflection and evaluation of shared classroom experiences developed among the novice colleagues. In addition, their conversation showed evidence of growing agency in two respects: confident voluntary professional interaction with peers and secondly, use of personally defined criteria for evaluating and selecting preferred strategies.

There was a marked difference between the level of metacognitive language in the discourse of the group of fourth year students and that of the three preceding groups. There was no hesitation in the four fourth year student teachers' responses which were clearly framed in conceptual terms. They made critical evaluative statements which issued from their beliefs and principles. The following fourth year students' responses to questions about learning and reading theories illustrates our analysis as follows:

- *Constructivism – but we don't have a choice. But the theory does make sense. [I] definitely believe in it, even though I'd like to have more knowledge of the others. Theory helps you to justify why a thing works. Dr*

B made us think about different theories and decide what we believe in. Constructivism will be my bloodline (sic) at the moment.

- *I think a combination – behaviourism’s emphasis on rewards is important.*
- *Some [theories] I didn’t agree with, like Freud’s.*
- *I haven’t really linked these to reading – only constructivism.*
- *But behaviourism is also important. It works well with other theories. Like one should still do some drill. There is a place for all the theories.*

This group displayed a consistently independent critical evaluative stance towards a number of domains. In the main, the fourth year student teachers consistently showed their critique of observed practice in school settings; critique of professional epistemological orientation in schooling; a disposition to recognise their own social positioning in a professional setting but also to exercise agency and to notice children’s epistemological shifts; critique of the content, structure and sequencing of the curriculum they were following; and the ability to exercise selectivity in relating theory and practice.

In summary, this group of four fourth year student teachers displayed three dimensions of development proposed by Haig and Ward (2004 in Ministry of Education, 2005) as mentioned on page 1 - 2 of this paper:

1. Critical and reflexive competence;
2. A disposition to look beyond the immediate, to search for meaning and to challenge the norm;
3. Application, internalization and transfer of acquired knowledge.

TOWARDS CONSTRUCTIVIST TEACHER EDUCATION

Further analysis of similar conversations framed by alternative models might reveal some of the relative merits of their outcomes respectively. As we looked at the outcomes of this fourth year group we deemed it necessary to reflect on the mechanisms that had intensified these student teachers’ construction of deep intellectual knowledge about reading teaching and children’s literature. We were motivated to scrutinize practices

which we believe supported them. Munby and Russell (1998) claim that teaching teachers is not portrayed as helping teachers to construct a constructivist view of their own teaching. Our empirical data contradict this view: we indeed assist the student teachers to achieve this.

We believe that the features of integration in our program assist our student teachers to construct a constructivist view of their own teaching. Barone, Berliner, Blanchard, Casanova and McGowan (1996) affirm that many teacher education programs consist of a collection of separated courses in which theory is presented without much connection to practice. We have observed that teacher education programs also often consist of a collection of separated theory courses without much connection to one another. We have responded to this fragmentation, through collegial collaboration.

Ben-Peretz (1995) cautions that the hidden curriculum of teacher education tends to communicate a fragmented view of knowledge both in coursework and in field experiences. By way of our collegial collaboration we have attempted to heed Ben-Peretz' warning. For example, the Drama in Education and Reading teacher educators align story-telling aspects of their courses for the same group of first year student teachers. And the Education teacher educator aligns content of Vygotsky's theories with the Reading teacher educator's scaffolding techniques for young children's listening and speaking. In this way we have attempted to make the connections between the separate courses in our program. Several authors cite the importance of teacher educators' modeling of constructivist approaches that engage students in interdisciplinary exploration, collaborative activity, and field-based opportunities for experiential learning, reflection, and self-examination (Kaufman, 1996; Kroll and LaBosky, 1996).

We believe that our successive model of TP has supported the multi-dimensional strength of our fourth year students. As stated earlier in this paper, our successive teaching model has a grade-sequential design which requires scrutiny. Our analysis showed that the TP provides a variety of contexts in which our student teachers develop professional

dispositions. But it may also restrict the development of conceptual knowledge if student teachers tend to reflect on a concept exclusively in relation to a particular school grade.

Haig and Ward (2004 in Ministry of Education, 2005) describe the nature of student teachers' conceptual development as *the struggle of looking beyond the immediate, to search for meaning and to challenge the norm*. To illustrate this *struggle*, we revert to the reading teacher educator's description of a conceptual struggle that she had with a fourth year student teacher this year. A fourth year student requested the reading teacher educator to teach her about teaching the phonic –sh-. The teacher educator had done this conceptual aspect extensively in this student teacher's second year. In short, this fourth year student teacher revealed that she did not teach –sh- during her grade one TP in her second year. This raised two concerns for the reading teacher educator. Firstly, this student teacher showed her lack of understanding of the general conceptions of phonics teaching since she was concerned with a specific phonic. One could perhaps describe the student teacher's integration of her knowledge of phonics as fragmented or delayed.

The second concern is her referential connection of phonics to her teaching practicum grade. This alerts that we are possibly too prescriptive with grade specific requirements in our TP. By this we mean that this student teacher's understanding of a particular concept, in this case, phonics, is dependent on a connection to a particular context. It appears that this student teacher is missing some parts of the whole theoretical phonics package in her knowledge integration.

We are considering that perhaps our grade-sequential practicum is too linear in its impact on the connections between perceptual theory, conceptual theory and practice, given that some fourth year students teachers have the *illusion of the utility of pre-packed knowledge* of reading teaching for that grade (Alarcão and Moreira, 1993). Our TP design seems to be more adequate as a map for navigating perceptual knowledge than for navigating the consistent distribution of conceptual knowledge to teach reading at various levels. This assertion derives from our observations of some fourth year student teachers who often struggle to move beyond the perceptual into the conceptual knowledge domains, to move beyond the grade experience into the concepts of the subject taught in

that grade. To iterate Haig and Ward (2004 in Ministry of Education, 2005): they seem to indicate *the struggle of looking beyond the immediate, to search for meaning and to challenge the norm.*

Korthagen (1999) explains two types of theory for teacher education: perceptual theory and conceptual theory. Perceptual theory consists of theoretical elements of the specific needs and concerns of the teacher and the situation under reflection. It should help the teacher to perceive those characteristics of the situation that are important to the question of how to *act* in the situation. But student teachers need knowledge that brings their already existing, subjective perception of personally relevant classroom situations one step further: to conceptual theory, which offers general concretions, applicable to a wide variety of situations, based on research. It can be characterized as "objective" theory because it is formal academic theory, which aims at *understanding* a situation. Conceptual theory is generalized over many situations.

With reference to the ‘-sh- phonic dilemma’ of the fourth year student teacher, the reading teacher educator responded by revisiting conceptual theory of phonics teaching with the intention of strengthening the student teacher’s conceptual understanding of teaching all phonics in many situations. For example, that a letter combination (digraph) like –sh- represents one unique speech sound just like ch, wh and th, and that consonant blends are two letters that make two distinct sounds (such as cl, st, pr) or that silent letter spellings retain the sound of one consonant (kn-, wr-, -mb). The reading teacher educator assessed that the student teacher carried an understanding of *how to act* in grade one teaching (perceptual knowledge) but that the fourth year student did not integrate her understanding of the deeper phonics concept.

CONCLUSION

Teaching student teachers to teach children to read is intricate. Developing the student teachers’ understanding of the relationship between theory and practice remains a challenge worthy of thoughtful pursuit.

We maintain that teacher educators' modeling of constructivist approaches that engage student teachers in interdisciplinary exploration, collaborative activity and field-based opportunities is a good starting point in this pursuit.

It is our contention that four years of a successive TP model that commences with learning early in the first year, across a range of diverse contexts throughout the four years, produces teacher education graduates who indicate critical and reflexive teaching competence.

We have seen that a grade-sequential TP design carries many advantages for reading teacher education. But our investigation also alerts us to the possibility that a grade-sequential TP design may be more useful for organizing perceptual knowledge than for consistently achieving conceptual knowledge for reading teaching.

REFERENCES:

Alarcão, I. and Moreira, A. 1993. Technical Rationality and Learning by Reflecting On Action in Teacher Education: dichotomy or complement? *International Analyses of Teacher Education*, 19, (1) (p. 31-40)

Arminen, I. 1999. Review essay: "Conversation analysis: a quest for order in social interaction and language use". *Acta Sociologica 1999* (p. 251-257).

Barone, T., Berliner, D. C., Blanchard, J., Casanova, U., and McGowan, T. 1996. A future for teacher education. In J. Sikula (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (2nd ed.) (p. 1108-1149). New York: Macmillan.

Ben-Peretz, M. 1995. Curriculum of teacher education programs. In L. W. Anderson (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of teaching and teacher education* (p. 543-547). Oxford / New York / Tokyo: Elsevier Science / Pergamon.

Calderhead, J. 1989. Reflective teaching and teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 5(1), (p. 43-51).

Cobb, VL. 1999. An International Comparison of Teacher Education.
<http://www.ericdigests.org/2000-3/teacher.htm>

Department of Education. 2006. The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa. "*More teachers; Better teachers*". Pretoria.

Holt, R. 2003. "Bakhtin's dimensions of language and the analysis of conversation". *Communication Quarterly*; Spring 2003, (p. 225-245).

Kaufman, D. 1996. Constructivist-based experiential learning in teacher education. *Action in teacher education*. 18(2), (p. 40-49). EJ 536 845

Korthagen, F . 1999. Linking Theory and practice: Changing the Pedagogy of Teacher Education. *Educational Researcher*, 28 (4), (p. 4-17).

Kroll, L. R., & LaBosky, V. K. 1996. Practicing what we preach: Constructivism in a teacher education program. *Action in teacher education* 18(2), 63-72. EJ 536 947

Lortie, D. 1975. *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

MacKinnon, A., & Scarff-Seatter, C. 1997. Constructivism: Contradictions and confusion in teacher education. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Constructivist Teacher Education: Building New Understandings*, (p.38-55). Washington, DC: Falmer Press.

Ministry of Education. 2005. Research on Initial Teacher Education in New Zealand: 1993-2004.
<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=9961&indexid=6>

Moats, L. 1999. *Teaching Reading Is Rocket Science*. American Federation of Teachers. 555 New Jersey Ave., NW. Washington, DC. 20001-2079. (Item No. 372)

Munby, H. & Russell, T. 1998. Epistemology and context in research on learning to teach science. In B. Fraser & K. Tobin (Eds.), *International handbook of science_education* (p. 643-665). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer.

Nezvalová, D. 2007. Pre-service Teacher Training at Palacky University. Faculty of Science, Palacky University, Olomouc.

Oldfather, P., Bonds, S., and Bray, T. 1994. Drawing the circle: Collaborative mind mapping as a process for developing a constructivist teacher education program. *Teacher Education Quarterly* (3), (p 5-13). EJ 492 137

Perry, C. and Power, B. 2004. Finding the Truths in Teacher Preparation Field Experiences. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Spring 2004 (p.125).

Richardson, V. 1997. Constructivist teaching and teacher education: Theory and practice. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Constructivist Teacher Education: building new understanding*. (p. 3-14). Washington, DC: Falmer Press.

Robinson, M. 2005. Models for the initial professional education of teachers: 3 year BEd + 1 year Advanced Diploma: Induction OR 4 year B. Ed. *Discussion document prepared for the Deans of Education forum of 20 October 2005*.

Segerdahl, P. 1998. "Scientific studies of everyday life: the example of conversation analysis". *Language & communication* 18, (p. 275-323).

Szabo, S., Scott, M. and Yellin, P. 2002. Integration: A Strategy To Help Preservice Teachers Make the Connection between Theory to Practice. *Action in Teacher Education*, 24 (3), (p.1-9)

ten Have, P. 2006. Review essay: Wooffitt, R. 2005. "Conversation analysis and discourse analysis: comparative and critical introduction". *Forum: qualitative social research*. 7(2), Art.3. March 2006. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2-06/06-2-2-e.htm>

Vidović, VV., Et al. 2005. Lifelong Teacher Education: Multiple Perspectives. Institute for Social Research, Zagreb.

Wahl, D., Weinert, F., Huber, G. 1984. *Psychologie für die schulpraxis* [Psychology for teaching practice]. München: K6sel Verlag.

Wubbels, T. 1992. Taking account of student teachers' preconceptions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 8(2), (p.137-149).