

# THEORISING TEACHING

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**ABSTRACT** *Theorising of teaching is not limited to the major theorists, as researchers and teachers also theorise teaching. This article explores theorising by researchers and a teacher in two ways: firstly, an overview or framework from the research literature on teaching as a sociocultural practice is developed, and secondly, the framework is tested by analysing the transcripts of a beginning teacher talking about her teaching.*

## KEY WORDS

Theorising, sociocultural, teaching practices, research, beginning teacher

## INTRODUCTION

Theorising is an important aspect of both the research process and the process of teachers reflecting on their practice. “Theory” is used here in the sense of “an architecture of ideas—a coherent structure of interrelated concepts ...” (Anyon, 2009, p. 3). This article discusses the development and testing of one such “coherent structure”.

Theories or “coherent structures” are used only if they are deemed useful by a particular research community to account for data generated, with theories being reconstructed or rejected accordingly. Theory is used in or enters into all stages of the research process, to inform our practices, and may be tacit or explicit. It is theory that distinguishes “good scholarship from even the best journalism” (Anyon, 2009, p. 4).

Anyon (2009) asserts that “No fact is theory-free. Every datum embodies and encodes—and is therefore understood through—theory laden explanations ... any explanation, no matter how small, involves a theory waiting to be explicated. When we “understand” or try to explain an observed event or recorded interview, we are calling on theories, large or small.” (p. 4). Hence, theorising qualitative findings in educational research takes our thinking beyond description to explain and account for the findings, linking them to a broader perspective. Theorising expands “the coherence of ... ideas and the breadth and depth of ... interpretations and explanations” (Anyon, 2009, p. 9). To use a metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle, the findings or data are represented by the picture on each piece, and the theorising would be represented by the picture of the completed jigsaw. The pieces of the jigsaw puzzle make sense when we can understand the bigger picture of the completed jigsaw. Anyon comments that “theory should help us deepen our research process and raise the level of our studies’ meanings, significantly extending and enriching the yield of our empirical work ... (explaining) what is apparent as well as that which lies beyond” (p. 5).

In addition, there is an interactive relationship between data/practice and theory, each one “involving and invoking the other” (Anyon, 2009, p. 5). Theory and practice are not viewed as a dichotomy—theory or practice—but as linked and related conceptions: theory and practice, theory into practice, theory informing practice, practice informing theory. The term “praxis” is also used to indicate this relationship between theorising and taking transformational action for social justice (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Freire, 1972; Lather, 1991).

The terms “theorising practice” and “theorising data” are used to emphasise the purpose and use of theory in educational research (within those paradigms with ontologies of constructed reality) to go beyond description to explain and illuminate classroom teaching practice.

In this article, I will be theorising in two ways. Firstly, I will report on the development of a structure, overview or framework from prior research on classroom teaching practices, where the findings have largely been analysed and theorised as sociocultural practices using Grounded Theory. Secondly, I will report on the use of this framework in analysing the transcripts of a secondary teacher talking about her teaching. Hence, I am “work(ing) ‘down’ from grand theory” (Delamont, 1992, p. 161) and “thinking with theory” (Anyon, 2009, p. 7).

Theorising pedagogy was the topic of a special issue of the *Waikato Journal of Education* (Bell, 2003), when I posed the question of how we as researchers might theorise “pedagogy” in our research on teaching. The theorising used by the authors ranged from post-structural (e.g., Middleton, 2003) to that extending the theorising of learning to pedagogy (e.g., Cowie, 2003). Now, seven years on, I find myself again in the situation of theorising pedagogy, this time theorising or explaining the data generated when I interviewed ten beginning teachers talking about their teaching. How would I theorise “teaching” and “pedagogy” now?

Firstly, I decided not to start with data I had generated, and not to use an inductive Grounded Theory approach (Harry, Sturges & Klingner, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to develop emergent themes and theorising from these, as I had done in previous research (e.g., Bell & Cowie, 2001; Bell & Gilbert, 1996). Instead, I started with the widely held theory in the research literature that teaching can be theorised as a sociocultural practice, with the main goal of sociocultural theorising being to create an account of human thinking and action that recognises the essential relationships between mind and action, and their social, cultural and institutional settings (Nuthall, 1997; Wertsch, 1991; Wertsch, Del Rio & Alvarez, 1995). Hence, the sociocultural theorising of teaching creates an account of teacher thinking and action, recognising not only the relationship between mind and action, but also between mind/action and the social, cultural and institutional contexts in which teaching is done. In addition, the notion of “practice” communicates something wider than a technique and skill; something incorporating, as well, knowledge, making judgements, intuition, and the purposes for the action (Beckett & Hager, 2002).

But how does this sociocultural theorising translate into actual classroom practices as discussed by teachers? What classroom teaching practices have other researchers theorised as sociocultural? A review of the relevant literature had been

undertaken from 2002 to 2009 to develop and structure a masters' level taught paper on teaching, with the aims of the paper being for students to

1. critically reflect on their own practice;
2. articulate and critique their own current theorising on pedagogical practices;
3. describe and evaluate the current theorising of pedagogy in the international research and development literature; and
4. describe, critique and discuss current pedagogical issues being debated, both nationally and internationally.

From the recent research literature on teaching, it was possible to identify classroom teaching practices that researchers have theorised as sociocultural practices; namely, teaching as relational, knowledge, social, cultural, gendered, emotion, caring, ethical, and learning practices. The 12-session masters' paper was developed around these nine practices. However, a feature of this reviewed literature is that only one or two related sociocultural classroom practices tend to have been discussed in any one article. Hence, the value of a list of nine inter-related practices is that it can be seen as a structure, overview or framework, which in a sense, is a qualitative meta-analysis. The structure can be seen to have some coherence in that sociocultural theorising is common to all nine practices.

The question then posed was whether this structure or framework of sociocultural practices in the literature could be used to account for and theorise teachers talking about their classroom teaching? Or in other words, does the framework developed from the literature have explanatory power in the analysis and theorising of teacher talk about classroom practices? Can teachers' talk about their teaching be categorised using this framework? Is the data of one teacher talking about her teaching able to interact with the structure or framework to develop it further?

## **THE RESEARCH DATA**

The research data analysed here was generated in the research project: Making a difference: The role of initial teacher education and induction in the preparation of secondary teachers, (Anthony et al., 2008), undertaken in New Zealand during 2005-2007. As part of the data generation, a national sample of 100 secondary beginning teachers from the 2005 graduating national cohort of initial teacher education preservice teachers was interviewed three times during their first two years of teaching. As many of the interview questions encouraged teachers to talk about their teaching, it was decided to undertake a secondary analysis of this data, with the interview questions being those in the original interviews on "being a beginning teacher". Hence, the interview questions were not specifically addressing the already discussed sociocultural aspects of teaching.

One secondary beginning teacher, Teacher G, was interviewed three times by the author. The first interview (indicated in the text as I1) was in June 2006, the second (I2) in December 2006 and the third (I3) in June 2007. Teacher G was interviewed on her experiences as a beginning teacher in a single sex girls' high school. Teacher G's transcripts were chosen for analysis as she was very articulate

about her teaching and was succeeding in teaching. Teacher G was a mid-career preservice teacher, having had a previous career in human resources. Teacher G was born in Australia, had lived in England and had come to New Zealand 17 years ago. Teacher G rated her satisfaction with teaching a “4: very satisfied” in all three interviews.

The transcripts were analysed for those segments when she was talking about her teaching, and these segments were then analysed to see whether they could be categorised into one of the sociocultural practices identified in the literature. This resulted in the bulk of lines in the transcripts being coded. Those that were not tended to be about procedural matters (the steps taken to become a registered teacher in New Zealand, for example), or responses to self-efficacy statements, using a Likert scale.

The findings are documented here, with a short description of each teaching practice from the literature review first, and then the data analysis from the transcripts. Many transcript quotations start with the interview question to which Teacher G was responding. The list is arranged here in alphabetical order.

## **THE FINDINGS**

### **Teaching as a cultural practice**

In recent literature, teaching as a cultural practice is seen to be evident when we, as teachers, take into account, value and build on the lived cultural experiences and knowledge of students and hence their cultural identity. When teachers and students belong to the same cultural group, appropriate cultural practices are often tacit as there is a shared understanding of what actions are appropriate and what knowledge counts as important between members of the group. When the teacher is of a different cultural background to the students she or he is teaching, the practice of teaching brings into the spotlight the notion of teaching as a cultural practice, and in particular, the notion of power in the relationship between teacher and student (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Delpit, 1993).

There were four transcript segments in which teaching as a cultural practice was specifically discussed, for example

[x, a Māori teacher educator] said in his lecture that he thought the best teacher of Māori students was a Pākehā teacher that he observed. And so I took that to mean that his methods probably were across the board, and certainly at the school that I’m at [there is a] huge diversity in ethnicities. I’ve used them [pedagogies for Māori students] and had huge success with all sorts of different nationalities, so I find that extremely interesting. (I2)

This discussion was generated from the specific interview questions about Teacher G’s sense of preparedness to teach Māori and Pasifika students, after her year-long initial teacher education programme. Although Teacher G did not discuss teaching as a cultural practice in detail, she did discuss at length some of the practices considered to be part of the effective teacher of Māori students profile

(Bishop & Berryman, 2006), including teaching as relational, caring and social practices.

### **Teaching as an emotion practice and a caring practice**

Another aspect of teaching as a sociocultural practice in the literature is that of teaching as an emotion and a caring practice. (The term “emotional practice” is not used here to avoid “emotional” being linked with “irrational”). Teachers are not just knowledge and skills workers, they are emotion workers as well (Hargreaves, 1998) and emotions can be viewed as constructed in relationships, rather than being viewed as personal dispositions (Zembylas, 2004). Three aspects of teaching as an emotion practice have been identified

1. Emotion work refers to work done to understand others, to empathise, and to feel their feelings (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Emotion work is a part of caring as a teaching practice (Noddings, 1992) for students, colleagues or their family.
2. Emotion labour is a term used to describe how individuals control and manage their emotions to make sure that they are expressed in a way that is consistent with social norms or expectations. When emotions are faked, suppressed, underplayed or overplayed by teachers, they perform emotion labour. Too much emotion labour may result in teacher burnout. (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Zembylas, 2002, 2003)
3. Emotions can be used evaluatively in relationships, in that emotions, as perceived by the teacher, provide evidence for what she or he values. (Zembylas, 2004)

Teacher G’s interviews contained 24 interview segments related to teaching as a caring practice and as an emotion practice. These two practices are documented together as they were often discussed together in the same interview segment.

Teacher G talked about her how she cared about her students achieving learning outcomes at school

... these girls are either stood down on daily report, detention, usually out of uniform. It took a whole term for them not to swear, not to swear at me, to stay in their seats, either engage with the class or at the very least not interfere with the class ... at the end of the first term I felt quite discouraged until I talked to some of the teachers and especially the deputy head. I said I didn’t feel like I had got anywhere academically ... and she said “I think you’ve done wonders because of the nature of them” and this term, this last term, we’ve actually made some progress academically and looking back I think I was a bit impatient, ... they needed that whole term just for them to have some trust in me. (I1)

Teacher G showed her teaching as a caring practice in the interest she took in her students and in getting to know them

It took me probably a term for them [the students] to trust me and I spent a lot of time getting to know them and what sports they played, where they worked. I gave them each a little questionnaire thing when I first started about their likes and dislikes. (I1)

Teacher G cared about how other students spoke about her Year 12 class, using her own values as a basis for her caring

... I was horrified. The next class coming in one day said “what’s this, the cabbage class?” Well I haven’t lost my temper, but I was so annoyed with that child and I said to them “Don’t you dare come into my classroom, and say anything like that to my students”. And in the next class, I told my Year 12s, I said “Don’t you dare stand for anyone telling you that. Everybody has strengths and weaknesses”. (I1)

Teacher G discussed her caring practice of keeping students safe (for example, emotionally safe) when the topic of child abuse was included in a book that the class had to read (I1). Teacher G also commented on her practice of caring about the students’ emotional lives, noting their emotional situation when they entered the classroom (I2). She also mentioned the way the students cared for her when she hurt her ankle, by opening doors and carrying her books.

Emotion labour was described by Teacher G, for example, when she discussed what she had learnt in her first year of teaching, about working with other staff

Gosh, learnt how to write reports ... The software system the school uses is pretty pathetic and so that causes problems and it causes frustration amongst other staff and that’s an area I don’t particularly like because it causes a lot of tension because it’s just the wrong system and it falls apart every time people do reports, so the tension rises, so [I] don’t like that. I’ve learnt to be very diplomatic around report time and give [other] teachers their space. (I2)

Emotion labour was also indicated when Teacher G commented on the unfairness of having to teach the challenging Year 12 class, and her frustration at not having a classroom in which to teach all her classes in (I2, I3).

Teacher G expressed her own feelings when talking about her teaching—for example, the negative feelings she had had in her first 18 months of teaching—by using words such as “nervous”, “not feeling confident”, “awful”, “horrified”, “battling”, “so annoyed”, “discouraged”, “irate”, “feel the tension”, “grumpy”, “exasperated”, “tired”, “pathetic”, “frustration”, “cried”, “huge pressures”, “did not enjoy”, “not done a lot”, “upset”, “demoralising”, “unfair”.

Teacher G also expressed her positive feelings about her teaching, using such words as “amazed”, “successes”, “inspiring”, “enjoyable”, “very relaxed”, “laughter”, “smiled”, “very sweet”, “pleasure”, “passionate”, “supportive”, “helpful”, “impressed”, “pleased with”, “interested”, “celebrate”, “wonderful”, “fabulous”, “formidable”, “wonderful”, “fascinated”.

### **Teaching as an ethical and professional practice**

In the literature, teaching is viewed as an ethical practice. Teachers need to be ethical, respectful and responsible to protect the welfare of the students given the students' dependency, vulnerability and powerlessness; to ensure fairness and equity of opportunity and outcomes of students; and to not abuse their power and status (Hall, 2001). Teachers also need to be ethical to teach and model ethical behaviour for the moral development of children, reflecting a society's and culture's expectations, norms, values, and mores; for example, social justice, democratic rights and human rights. Being ethical also requires teachers to be competent and appropriately qualified as teachers, to practice ethical collegiality and to manage ethical conflicts (Hall, 2001).

There were no transcript segments specifically on teaching as an ethical practice. However, Teacher G's transcripts contained many segments on professional caring for her students, and in particular, that her students succeeded academically. She was also mindful of her teaching practices as relational, and she indicated a keen sense of social justice and fairness; for example, in her differentiated teaching practices and treating the girls with respect and expecting them to do so as well.

### **Teaching as a gendered practice**

In the literature, teaching as a gendered practice is evident when teachers take into account the gender of the students they are teaching. For example, feminist pedagogies are those that address the educational goals of girls and young women, value girls' and young women's lived experiences, prior knowledge, ways of learning and knowing, and aspirations. A feminist pedagogy also takes into account the deconstruction of power relationships and positioning of girls and women in society, a curriculum and in the classroom (Gilbert, 1997; Gore, 1993; Middleton, 1993). In a similar way, teaching boys can also be constructed as a gendered practice (Mills & Keddie, 2007).

There were no transcript segments in which teaching as a gendered practice was specifically addressed. This may have been a result of the actual interview questions, which did not address this aspect of differentiated teaching. However, Teacher G taught in a single sex girls' school and during the interviews discussed teaching practices to motivate and engage girls, especially based on her experiences with her two teenage daughters; for example: writing to a pen pal (I1); movies aimed at a teenage girl audience (I1); small group discussions (I1); and books with a teenage girl as the main character (I1). Hence, Teacher G recognised gender differences in her teaching.

### **Teaching as a knowledge practice**

The literature on teaching asserts that teachers need to know and use many different kinds of knowledges to teach (Shulman, 1987; Shulman & Shulman, 2004), depending on the sociocultural contexts in which the teaching is done. These multiple knowledges include knowledge of the subject matter to be learnt; the

curriculum; how students learn; the progression of concepts as students learn the content; pedagogical knowledge; pedagogical content knowledge; students and their lives: family, culture, friends; the school and community; national and state education policy and a vision of and purpose for education. Of these, pedagogical content knowledge is seen as important as it is unique to a teacher's professional knowledge (Jones & Moreland, 2004; Loughran, Mulhall, & Berry, 2004).

There were 16 interview transcript segments that could be categorised as teaching as a knowledge practice. These segments contained comments by Teacher G that indicate she used different kinds of knowledges in her teaching practices (Shulman, 1987). Teacher G indicated her knowledge of content

... and academically I feel very confident and very strong in especially English, it's been my passion for years, ... it's not to say I know everything the kids ask, obviously. There's content questions I don't know or I haven't read the book or whatever ... but in terms of grammar or structural stuff like that, I don't have any problems at all.  
(I1)

She had a knowledge of her students; for example, what interested them and engaged them

[The department] suggested to me two extended texts and two films and I just looked at the kids, ... and I thought "it ain't going to work, there's just no way this is going to work" ... [I spoke with the] Year 12 coordinator in English and told her of my concerns. ... I said "I just can't see these kids interacting with either of these things" and she said "well it's your call, you know, you do it". So I went with my gut instinct and it was exactly right. I mean it ended up with things that the kids loved. ... I got huge satisfaction out of realising that I was right in terms of my gut instinct ... I was spot on with them, ... just the match between the film and the girls was perfect and they are not good writers but at least they had something that they did engage with and they were happy to talk about. (I1)

She had knowledge of their home situation, as indicated when she talked about what it means to be a "good" teacher

... I think a good teacher is more than the classroom. I think a good teacher looks at the pastoral role, but also the greater community ... and I ring parents a lot, I involve parents a lot ... (I3)

Teacher G indicated she had a knowledge of the students' prior knowledge and skills (I2), educational theory (I3), how to teach the content (pedagogical content knowledge) (I2) and planning (I2).

### **Teaching as a learning practice**

The literature indicates that teaching may be viewed as a learning practice. Learning by teachers (or teachers as learners) is embedded in reflection and reflexive practice (Middleton, 1993, 2003); praxis (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, Lopez-

Torres, 2003); action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart 1988); self-study (Loughran, 2005; Loughran, Hamilton, La Boskey & Russell, 2004), mentoring, coaching (Robertson, 2005); identity formation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), and may be viewed as teacher development including professional, personal and social development (Bell & Gilbert, 1996).

Teacher G discussed the learning that had occurred for her whilst she was a beginning teacher. She made 40 comments in this category over the three interviews, but this number was not surprising given that the focus of each of the three interviews was on learning by the beginning teachers in their initial teacher education year and the first 18 months of teaching.

Teacher G indicated that her learning practices included attending meetings run by the senior management (I2/I3), and observation and feedback of her own teaching by senior management. Students also gave her feedback on her teaching

[And what about feedback from students, do you get any?]

Yes I do. I have a post box, so at the end of a unit [of work] from Year 9 all the way through, they don't have to put their names on it, they can say anything they like about the unit. So most of them, I'm surprised how mature they are, on the most part they seem to enjoy it. (I3)

Colleagues had also given her informal feedback

[What about informal feedback from colleagues?]

People from within my department have often said, if they pop in and out, and they always say that the students are engaged and working well and that I seem to know what I'm doing ... (I3)

Teacher G indicated that she learnt about teaching through attending professional development courses, seminars, workshops and conferences run by people outside of the school, having attended a regional seminar on the NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement), an ESOL (English as a Second language) workshop, a creative writing workshop with an author, an English teachers' conference, a visiting researcher's lecture at the university, and classroom visits by a regional advisor (I2/I3).

Within her school, she indicated that regular discussions with a specifically nominated "buddy" had helped her learning (I3), as had her practice of asking for help (I1). Teacher G also attended the professional development activities for all staff (I3) and observed other teachers' teaching (I1). She also did professional reading of educational theory and research (I2) and reflection on her practice, especially during school holidays (I2).

### **Teaching as a relational practice**

The literature highlights that teaching may be viewed as a relational practice, with relationships being seen as very important by teachers (Bauml, 2009; Giles, 2008). The relationship is not just about caring for the student, for when teachers and students interact to communicate in day-to-day classroom activities this is done so

within a relationship. Both relate to each other during the communication and hence the relationship is co-constructed. It is within this relationship that learning is mediated (Wertsch, 1991) and power discursively constructed by the teacher (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Devine, 2003). Likewise, teachers construct relationships with colleagues (Bell, 2006). The relatedness and connectedness may be viewed more widely as in the spiritual dimension of teaching, with teaching seen as the interaction with and relating to, not just the mind, but the mind, body, spirit of students in harmonious and holistic ways to honour wholeness and interconnectedness (Gibbs, 2006; Schon, 2005).

Teacher G explicitly spoke of her teaching as a relational practice in all three interviews. There were 18 interview segments identified in this category.

In interview 1, after six months of teaching, Teacher G identified her relationships with the students as a key priority for her

[When you graduated last year, what did you think teaching would be like?]

... it is exactly what I thought it would be and I really, really enjoy it ... it's a comfortable, sort of very satisfying feeling that I get from it and I love the challenges and I love the kids and I never realised the relationship you would form so easily with them and I've never laughed so much, I love every class, they're just gorgeous ...

[... What have been the most rewarding experiences as a beginning teacher?]

The relationship with the kids without a doubt. I just, I really enjoyed that from Day 1.

[... And what's the most important thing to you about being teacher at this time?]

I think the most important thing is my relationship with the kids I teach and I think I've realised that unless I have a good relationship with them then I'm not going to teach them anything, basically. (I1)

In interview 2, after one year of teaching, Teacher G spoke of classroom management as a relational practice and the two-way nature of relationships

[... tell me what its been like since we talked in June?]

... and I also think relationships manage classrooms. ... I think I want to have a relationship with my students that's professional and friendly, but I don't necessarily feel that I have to please them. (I2)

Teacher G also spoke of teaching as being a relational practice with colleagues

(So what about informal support, did you have a buddy or ...)

Oh yes I meet [with] my buddy, we're meeting once every six days, in the six-day period, we still meet one period every six days, she's lovely. She runs a Te Reo Pākehā [unit], lovely young woman and I'm trying to think how long she's been working, but very efficient,

very organised and was somebody I was able to be quite frank with at times and we established a rapport very quickly and she was a good sounding board at times about different things. (I2)

In summary, Teacher G talked about the relationships she had with students and staff, relationships in which she practiced teaching.

### **Teaching as a social practice**

Another aspect of theorising teaching as a sociocultural practice in the research literature is theorising teaching as a social practice. Teaching involves social interaction with others; it is not something a teacher does without students. The dialogue between teacher and student is a social practice and we call this teaching. If teaching is viewed as a social practice, it can be seen as involving co-construction, mediation and scaffolding, and formative interaction:

- Co-construction. Teaching involves communication and shared meaning making in which teachers and students co-construct a shared understanding within purposeful communication (Bell, 2005; Driver, Asoko, Leach, Mortimer & Scott, 1994; Nuthall, 1997).
- Mediated actions and scaffolding. Teaching may be viewed as a social practice in which teachers undertake mediated actions and scaffolding. A mediated action is a human action that employs mediational means, such as technical tools (for example, a computer) and psychological tools (for example, language) (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). One type of mediated action done during teaching is scaffolding, which refers to the mediated actions of the teacher to support a student to function inside her or his zone of proximal development, which is when a student can achieve or perform a learnt task, only with help by the teacher.
- Formative interaction. Another aspect of teaching as a social practice is formative interaction (Moreland, Jones & Northover, 2001), also known as assessment for formative purposes (Bell & Cowie, 2001; Gipps, 1999). In the communication of teaching, feedback is given to students about their learning with respect to the learning goals, as is feedforward: that is, the subsequent teaching which helps the student close the gap between their existing understanding and actions and the learning goals. And for the teacher to give feedback and feedforward, students need to disclose what they know and don't know and this will occur within a trusting and respectful teacher–student relationship (Cowie, 2000).

Fifteen segments of the transcripts were categorised as being about teaching as a social practice: that is, co-construction, mediation and scaffolding, and formative assessment. Each of these teaching practices requires talking, discussion and dialogue between teacher and student or student and student, either face-to-face or online (Stephenson, 2001).

- Co-construction. Teacher G spoke of how she set up interactive activities in the class so that the students could co-construct shared understandings

... the way I work in the classroom is that I use that peer appreciation all the time ... at age 18 their peers are their model and I notice it in the classroom. I can see it happening in front of my eyes and I use that in the class and a lot of that group work is because they work well together. You know, they do listen to each other. They're more inclined to listen to each other than they're ever going to listen to me. So group work works in those situations provided you can keep the classroom management. You know, the structure has got to be there. (I1)

- Engagement. Teacher G indicated the ways in which she engaged the students with thinking and learning, for example

I am very controversial and I like to, for instance we did [the book] *Whale Rider* recently and I said to them ... "Aren't whales just cows in the water?" ... and everybody was up in arms, and I love doing stuff like that because then that promotes a discussion and they're able to prove to me that what I'm saying is incorrect. So playing the devil's advocate sometimes encourages that sort of thing as well and I don't mind them challenging me and I don't mind when I get it wrong. ... and I say to them that's wonderful because that shows me that you're being responsible for your own learning, you're not dependent on me, you're thinking for yourself. (I1)

- Mediation. Teacher G spoke of how she mediated her students' learning, for example

I have, for instance, a child in my Year 11 extension class, very, very bright young woman, but her first writing ... and I picked a consistent grammar problem. So in the first week of her writing, ... I took that [the student's writing] down to the ESOL teacher and she's been on a programme ever since, one period a week, and her writing just improved incredibly. It was just a grammatical hitch, that's all, ... she's obviously going to do something wonderful at university. Incredibly bright, very talented young woman. (I1)

- Scaffolding. Teacher G spoke of how she had scaffolded the units of learning so that the students could succeed in each step of the task

... I spent most of last summer, and that was a big advantage, getting myself organised, so I had all the units prepared and I made extra scaffolding steps for them [the low ability class] so that they weren't ever put in a position to fail because that's what they've done for six years ... and that really changed the attitude. ... [But] even at the end, I had one girl who would start every unit [with] "Miss, I can't read" and "I can't write". Every unit, and she did, I think, six of the units and achieved and wrote particularly well. What was astounding [was] the quality of the work that came out of these kids ... ( I2)

- Assessment for formative purposes. Assessment is an important part of what a teacher does and teaching is theorised as an assessment practice in the

literature, with assessment being theorised as a sociocultural practice (Bell & Cowie, 2001). While Teacher G did mention assessment for summative purposes in responses to questions on her preparedness to do assessment for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement, when she discussed her teaching, her talking was mainly about assessment for formative purposes:

[In what ways have your assessment practices developed over the past 18 months?]

I'm not so structured on the test as I was; I use different forms of assessment now in terms of formative assessment than I did before. ... I do it with my senior Year 11 extension class. ... I gave them a task, they had to do an essay, 200 words ... And then, I gave them a structured template to have a look at, ... they felt they could judge for themselves where they might have gone right or wrong. If they were happy with that, they didn't have to rework it. ... And they got another person of their own choosing to go through and check grammar and spelling and punctuation and things like that, and then they got it back again, then they had to rework it. And then I gave them an assessment sheet, the one I used for the marking criteria and they had to mark it themselves. ... I went over to see what they had done and in fact they marked themselves incredibly harshly, but they also had moved. There were individual differences in the way they were writing, and they had moved away from that (initial) format, ... I wanted to see some thinking and some different levels of thinking ... so that was very successful. (I3)

### **Summary**

Teacher G's transcripts were able to be analysed and the transcript segments categorised in the nine sociocultural practices of teaching identified in the literature. The nine practices listed, in descending order of number of quotes in each category were: learning, emotion and caring, relational, knowledgeable, social, cultural, gendered, and ethical. This order is reflective of Teacher G being a beginning teacher in her first two years of teaching.

### **ADDITIONAL FINDINGS**

There were two further categories in the analysis of the transcripts that were not in the initial literature review: teaching as embodied and spatial practices. These are now discussed, with the data first, followed by a literature review description, to reflect the researcher's thinking processes.

### **Teaching as an embodied practice**

Parts of the transcripts of Teacher G were categorised as her talking of teaching as an embodied practice. By this is meant, that teaching is not just a practice of the mind, it is also a practice of the body and the emotions (Shapiro, 1999).

In Interview 2, Teacher G discussed in five segments the time when she hurt her ankle and had trouble walking

[The next question is about your best day or experience, so ...]

That was easy, that was an unplanned lesson. ... I'm usually very organised, it's only ever happened once. It was only several weeks ago. It was a Year 9 class and for some reason I have a locked cabinet. I left my key at home, and I'd left my planning book in the staff room, and my ankle was sore. I walked into the classroom, and I thought, "Oh" ... and I thought about my sore ankle and I thought about the locked cupboard and away I went. And we had a fabulous lesson and the kids were really [engaged]. ... It was a great confidence booster because I knew then, that if all I had was a white board marker and I knew my class, I would be okay. ... [But it was also my worst experience] managing the three lots of stairs with a sprained ankle and trying not to get grumpy by Period 6 in the afternoon. ... I was just tired, and the ankle [was] sore and so I didn't have the concentration or the energy or enthusiasm level ... (I2)

A subsequent search of the literature indicated that if we view teaching as an embodied practice, we are giving the body primacy in the constructing knowledge and consciousness. Knowledge may be seen as always being embodied, that is, grounded in bodily existence (Shapiro, 1999), with education starting from lived experiences. Centrality is given to situated knowledge that is inscribed in the flesh, with no abstractions and "separation of mind and body, thought and feeling, creativity and existence" as in Western epistemologies and disembodied knowledge (Shapiro, 1999, p. xiii). In the context of this study, the body/subject can be seen as a means for producing pedagogical knowledge and practices, and producing pedagogical knowledge through an engagement with our own body experiences and memories (Shapiro, 1999). In this view, we are constructing the knowing mind, the knowing heart (emotions) and knowing body as one (Anttila, 2008). Barbour (2006) discusses embodiment as

Embodiment is a holistic experience, as distinct from the "body" (which remains differentiated from the "mind"). I argue that embodiment encompasses an individual person's biological (somatic), intellectual, emotional, social, gendered, artistic and spiritual experience, within their cultural, historical and geographical location. Embodiment is not a random or arbitrary set of genetic material – it recognises the material conditions of race, gender, sexuality, ability, history and culture. Embodiment therefore indicates a holistic experiencing individual. (p. 87)

Barbour (2006) also discusses the notion of embodied ways of knowing, and in this article, teaching can be construed as an embodied way of knowing.

### **Teaching as a spatial practice**

Segments of Teacher G's transcripts were categorised as teaching as a spatial practice. This aspect of teaching as a sociocultural practice had not been in the initial structure, overview or framework developed from a review of the literature. There were four interview transcript segments in which she discussed at length not having her own teaching room. She had commented that it was unfair that the senior, more experienced teachers had their own rooms, but not the beginning teachers. A hierarchical distribution of power via the allocation of teaching spaces was implied

... a lot of the senior teachers [are] teaching senior classes of 16 to a class, and they might have three classes because they have other responsibilities [and they are teaching] in their own room. And junior teachers, meaning junior in experience, not in age, have five or six classes of 30 junior students each and they are moving around. To me that seems totally unfair because 1) they [the senior teachers] are better managers, 2) they have half the students and 3) they have all that experience. ... I don't agree with it. I don't think it's right. (I3)

In her second year, she was expected to move around 11 classrooms, so she negotiated with her principal for her own teaching room

... if I'm moving all the time as a new teacher and I haven't got my resources with me, because I can't carry boxes of dictionaries and boxes of reading material and stuff like that, it must affect my students. ... and in fact it would have made it impossible to teach my unit standards girls the way I do, because I have all my units running concurrently and they can pick whatever they want. ... so it would have changed my teaching practice, it would have been terribly detrimental to it ... (I3)

In a subsequent search of the literature, "teaching as a spatial practice" may be understood as the "social" being inherently spatial and temporal, that is, the social relationships of teaching exist in space and time (Jenlink & Jenlink, 2008; Jewson, 2007). Teaching space may be construed as a physical working space as discussed by Teacher G; a virtual teaching space as in e-learning (Stephenson, 2001); spaces discursively constructed within communities of practice (Hirst & Cooper, 2008), and spaces for teaching and learning, in the landscapes within which teachers live and compose their teaching lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Clandinin, 2008.) But these are all spaces (and times) that constrain, enable and shape teaching.

### **CONCLUSION**

When teaching is theorised as a sociocultural practice, the literature suggests that teaching may be viewed as a number of related and interacting classroom practices, which teachers indicate they do in the classroom. These classroom practices can be

seen as forming a framework, an overview or qualitative meta-analysis. This was one of the ways in which theorising was used in this study.

The second way theorising was used in this study was when the framework of sociocultural teaching practices was then fruitfully used to analyse transcripts of a mid-career beginning secondary teacher talking about her teaching in three separate interviews. The analysis indicated that she discussed her teaching as a learning practice, an emotion and caring practice, a relational practice, a knowledge practice, a social practice, and a cultural practice, as documented in the literature. The transcripts also implied (that is, not directly stated) that she talked about her teaching as a gendered practice and ethical practice. The transcripts also contained segments that were subsequently categorised as teaching as spatial and embodied practices, which are not as well established in the research literature on teaching.

While the framework can be seen both as a “coherent structure” within the literature, and an analytical tool to categorise and theorise a teacher talking about her teaching, in what ways is it powerful and fruitful?

Firstly, the framework may be seen as coherent as many of the practices are interrelated, due to their sharing of the sociocultural theorising. In the teacher’s transcript, two or more of the practices were often talked about together in the same sentence. The framework preserves the complexity and richness of data generated when teachers reflect on and talk about their teaching.

Secondly, the framework accounted for most of Teacher G comments in the transcripts, indicating that the framework is not a narrow partial perspective of teaching. This aspect is important when we consider how we will represent qualitative research data (Brown, 1996; Eisenhart, 2006).

Thirdly, the framework is also fruitful in that it enabled the theorising of transcript segments not covered in the initial literature review of the original nine practices; for example, teaching as spatial and embodied practices. The framework can also be used to suggest other sociocultural practices that were not mentioned by this particular teacher; for example, teaching as a political practice (Locke, 2004; Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 2000). As other teachers’ transcripts are analysed the framework may be developed further. Hence, the framework enables theorising down to the data and also up from data. The framework is able to be developed from its interaction with data.

Fourthly, the use of the framework to analyse the transcript data indicates that teachers are both describing and theorising when they talk about their teaching.

Lastly, the value of teachers reflecting on, talking about and re-storying, and making sense of their lived experiences has been documented in the literature over many years as promoting teacher professional and personal learning and development in the teaching profession, whether it be in initial teacher education or in ongoing in-service learning (Brown, 1996; Loughran et al., 2004). It is hoped the framework developed from this research is useful in communicating with teachers learning about teaching in initial teacher education and master’s level programmes.

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