Gretchen Geng · Pamela Smith ·
Paul Black · Yoshi Budd · Leigh Disney
Editors

Reflective Practice in Teaching

Pre-service Teachers and the Lens of Life Experience

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Editors
Gretchen Geng
International Education Group
Beijing Foreign Studies University
Beijing, China

Paul Black
School of Education
Charles Darwin University
Darwin, NT, Australia

Leigh Disney
Monash University
Clayton, VIC, Australia

Pamela Smith
School of Education
Charles Darwin University
Darwin, NT, Australia

Yoshi Budd
RMIT University
Melbourne, VIC, Australia

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Part I
Background to the Book

Chapter 1
Learning from Reflective Pre-service Teachers: Introduction to the Book

Gretchen Geng, Pamela Smith, Paul Black, Yoshi Budd and Leigh Disney

Abstract This chapter introduces the background to this book, with a focus on the use of reflective practice in teaching, and teacher educators' learning from reflective pieces written by pre-service teachers. This chapter then describes the structure of the book, which consists of six parts. Parts I to V include 33 pre-service teachers' own narrative stories as well as the five editors' reflections on these pre-service teachers' pieces. In the final chapter, the five editors reflect on the content and development of this volume.

Introduction

> Reflective teachers are those who are aware of the reasons behind the decisions they make and the consequences of those decisions. There are many issues within classrooms and schools and the wider educational context that teachers need to continually reflect on and sometimes as a result of reflection change their thinking and practice or question practices and innovations … Learning the skills of critical reflection can help them make sense of the situations they face and helping them learn these skills during their course of study can set them on a path to become reflective teachers in their future careers . This is a

G. Geng (✉)
Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China
e-mail: gretchen.geng@gmail.com

P. Smith · P. Black
Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia
e-mail: pamelajsmith99@gmail.com

P. Black
e-mail: paul.black@easternroad.com.au

Y. Budd
RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia
e-mail: yoshi.budd@rmit.edu.au

L. Disney
Monash University, Clayton, Australia
e-mail: leigh.disney@monash.edu

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> long process, the benefits of which will help them become more effective teachers, develop positive relationships and deliver better learning outcomes for the students they will teach. (Smith et al. 2017, p. 25)

Following on from *The challenge of teaching* (Geng et al. 2017), this book uses reflective practice to connect the pre-service teachers' personal background with their placement experience around a self-selected topic. It also includes teacher educators' personal reflections on the pre-service teachers' reports on these issues of concern.

Dewey (1933, p. 7) described "reflection" or "reflective thinking" as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of grounds that support it and future conclusions to which it tends". Killen (2009) identified teaching reflection as a deliberate attempt to understand or evaluate the success or otherwise of teaching and learning experiences in order to shape future action or "reflection in action or on the run" (p. 103). Based upon this, teachers employ "self-study" or "self-evaluative reflection" on the level of reflecting on individual lessons they teach (Smith et al. 2017).

Reflective practice can provide important insights into the ways in which personal beliefs and life experiences act as a lens or filter for framing and understanding past experiences. In this book, we study how the reflective methods of pre-service teachers relate to their life experience and facilitate a deeper understanding of their own practices in different educational settings. Like our earlier book *The challenge of teaching* (Geng et al. 2017), this book provides a public forum for pre-service teachers' voices to be heard in order to bring to light the diverse, complex and challenging issues they are faced with during their practicum experiences.

The purpose of this book is to help produce reflective teachers, not academic researchers. Thus, even though the student chapters cannot represent their authors' thinking as experienced teachers, they do encourage them as well as other pre-service teachers to reflect on aspects of their practicum experiences and look into particular issues more deeply. Furthermore, we hope to instil a deeper appreciation of the diversity and complexity of pre-service teachers' classroom experiences. The ways in which pre-service teachers have, to various degrees, explored their values and beliefs and drawn on their past experiences also offer an important opportunity to examine the relationship between reflective practice and pedagogical concerns.

Bullough (2015, p. 158) commented that

> … research should be conducted on the ways in which prospective teachers' backgrounds and identifications (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background, etc.) may connect to and inform the ways in which prospective teachers define teaching … teachers may be used as texts by and through which to challenge and push students' understanding and ideas.

This book has a strong focus on the ways in which pre-service teachers develop and articulate their professional knowledge by presenting pre-service teachers' reflections on contemporary issues that engaged them during their own teaching practicums. Palmer (2008, p. 15) stated in "The heart of a teacher",

> knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly I cannot teach

> them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth.

Our book presents multiple levels of reflective practice as we editors, as authors, engage in reflective practice alongside our pre-service teachers. On one level, pre-service teachers share excerpts from their reflective journals, provide some personal background information and finally explain their professional response to the issues to enable the reader to glean a sense of a unique personal and professional identity. On another level, we editors reflect on our own pedagogical experiences which shape our reading of issues raised by pre-service teachers. We believe that we, as teacher educators and pre-service teachers alike, establish networks of personal, professional and cultural narratives that establish diverse ways of ordering and understanding our teaching practices and experiences. Consequently, our aim is to integrate the autobiographical characteristics of self-narrative from the perspective of pre-service teachers and teacher educators to further extend reflection on cultural and pedagogical assumptions that shape understandings of educational practices and experiences (Coia and Taylor 2017).

Reflective Practice in Teaching

Reflective practice is commonly used in teaching practicum programmes to bring to light routine interpretive activities that signify the beliefs and cultural assumptions of the knower. Australian society is not monolithic but made up of a richly diverse population of varying languages and cultures. Teaching is a dynamic process that must take into account not only the multicultural nature of the world in which we live, but also the powerful influence of new digital technologies that change the way we interact with the world and with each other. Vygotsky (1997) suggested that the role of the teacher is to facilitate student learning through carefully structured social interactions and scaffolded teaching and learning activities. However, as both students and teachers must navigate a rapidly changing and increasingly complex environment, it is also crucial that teachers do not make assumptions about their students' background knowledge and experiences.

Vygotsky (1998) described the dialectic of person and practice as a process of personal identity and practice. Pre-service teachers develop their own professional teacher identities over time as they draw on their own experiences as learners to navigate, understand and manage classroom situations. Consequently, teaching practices include engagement of pre-service teachers themselves in knowledge learning and this may require them to adjust their ways of thinking and behaving in the classroom. Stetsenkom and Arievitch (2004) explain that the learning journey of pre-service teachers is a period of self-transformation from a university student to a professional teacher. Edwards (2010) and Roth (2006) explain how histories, values and purposes

lead to transformation. It is dissonance that leads one to question these histories, hence the importance of critical incidents and reflective practice.

In this chapter, we focus on the self-transformation through reflective practice. By reflective practice, pre-service teachers' identities can be changed, especially when they are entering new classrooms and experience incidents that cause them to question their assumptions about teaching priorities and approaches. In 1999, Beach argued that "transitions are consequential when they are consciously reflected on, often struggled with, and the eventual outcomes changes one's sense of self and social positioning" (p. 114). In each of the following chapters, the authors have identified moments of uncertainty, of struggle, and a search for a resolution.

In our previous book, *The challenge of teaching* (Geng et al. 2017), the importance of developing reflective skills has been discussed in detail with rich stories from pre-service teachers themselves. Through reading the content of reflective practice stories by pre-service teachers, the teacher educators also look into the contemporary issues experienced by pre-service teachers while they are undertaking their teaching practicum. Reflective practice is not only for pre-service teachers but is part of a professional mindset. Through self-reflection, established teachers and teacher educators can also assure the quality of their teaching and identify gaps in their understanding.

Reflective Practice in Research

In the chapter, "The Importance of 'SELF'", in our previous book, Fry (2017) emphasised the abilities of "knowing the self" or "self-study" as a starting point for the private world of the individual to enable teachers to interact with the external world with further goals to develop their strong interpersonal behaviours and build effective working partnerships with their peers, students and families. Fry used geocentricism and ethnocentrism to assist his way of understanding of the world and his own behaviours during social exchanges.

With the understanding of "the importance of self" in mind, we can see there is at best a hairline distinction between reflective practice in teaching and its use in research, especially to the extent that the former is not reflection in the abstract, but based on observation and on discussion with students, teachers and/or parents. Action research is basically just a more systematic approach to virtually the same thing, typically involving cycles of questioning, gathering data, reflecting on the results and deciding on courses of action with the aim of improving one's practice (e.g. Ferrance 2000, p. 2).

Given that aim, it is understandable why action research must at least partially research the researchers themselves. At the same time, some researchers undertake research on themselves for more general purposes and using more general research frameworks. As one example, even in the early days of undertaking diary studies on language learning, researchers found ways of studying their own learning diaries in

ways that could be defended as legitimate research practice (e.g. Bailey and Ochsner 1983).

As another example, ethnographic research has long taken as a basic principle that the influence of the researcher on all stages, from the research design to the final analysis, cannot be avoided, but instead must be made explicit (e.g. Draper 2015, p. 38). It has furthermore been concerned with developing an "emic" perspective, that is how the insider sees, experiences, understands and expresses their "reality" (p. 38), and in fact ethnographic researchers are often members of the "culture" they are researching (p. 39). From here, it is a short step to researchers also researching themselves, through approaches that have become known as auto-ethnography that "have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher's voice is not included in the presentation of findings" (Denshire 2013; Holt 2003, p. 2). These might thus be considered more sophisticated bases for reflective practice.

About This Book

The heart of this book consists of 33 stories narrated by pre-service teachers, each presenting a glimpse of the writer's life experience and their potential as a classroom practitioner. Each of these stories discusses an aspect of pre-service teachers' classroom perspectives about educational practice. Following this introduction, the issues they write about have been categorised into five sections or "parts", each with an introduction by one of the editors, as described below. In each section, we suggest that you read through the editor's introductory chapter first and then continue on to the chapters written by pre-service teachers.

Part I includes seven student chapters (by Linda Hamilton, Terri Miller, Agniezka Medrecki, Jeremy Hunt, Brooke Trudgen, Alison Bosnakis and Mikaila Mangohig) that focus on preparing students for learning. The topics range from behaviour management to classroom layout, reading fluency, using visuals among special needs students, authentic assessment design and visual literacy, and homework design. This part is introduced by a chapter written by the editor Pamela Smith, with further discussion based upon her deep reflection in her teaching profession and teaching and learning experience in teacher training programmes.

Part II is introduced by the editor Paul Black and contains five student chapters (by Brodie Curtis, Caitlin Taylor, Kirsten Ifould, Zerina Haziabdic and Leah McNeilly). This section explores issues of how to engage students in their learning. These issues cover how to motivate students to learn, using personal music devices and music education, developing mindful learners, how to overcome high school students' negative attitudes towards language learning, and how to promote positive teacher–student relationships in secondary schools.

Part III focuses on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning, foregrounding the importance of incorporating ICT into classroom practice. This section has six student chapters (by Petros Gerakios, Anna Bascomb, Laura Checkley, Dominic May, Matthew Froese and Emily Ford), all of

which deal with how to implement new ICTs in teaching and learning. The editor Gretchen Geng begins this section by providing a reflective piece on her own experience of using and teaching ICTs in teacher training courses.

Part IV contains seven student chapters (by Jeremy Appleton, Hannah Young, Fiona Curtis, Nadia Lelli, Rachel Platte, Claire Gitzel and Meaghan Jones) dealing with the topic of well-being and the learning environment. The content of these chapters covers the issues of how to promote student well-being by developing empathy, the impact of mobile devices on young adults' sleep patterns, the importance of the physical classroom environment, the effect of arts pedagogies on primary boys' emotional intelligence, the implementation of yoga and the national school chaplaincy programme. This section includes a chapter written by the editor Leigh Disney, focused on an incident of self-study within his teaching experience, allowing him to understand the importance of well-being within early childhood settings.

Part V has eight student chapters (by Demi Cubillo, Rebecca Wood, Elizabeth McGuire, Blake Watherston, Casey Ellis, Jack Burton, Jing Weng and Kathryn Hamilton), all dealing with education and societal issues, generally covering gaming, NAPLAN negativity, examinations, culturally relevant content, gender and engagement in physical education, and sunscreen in early childhood settings. The editor Yoshi Budd begins this section by exploring the complex relationship between education and society.

These student stories are narrations, tending to be informal and colloquial, and the editors have tried to avoid excessive interference with the voices of their authors. At the same time, in a final part (VI) and chapter, the editors present their own collective reflections relating to these contributions and related matters.

Conclusion

This book presents 33 genuine and extraordinarily honest stories written by experienced and successful pre-service teachers. These strikingly interesting and authentic pieces of work present a range of different themes reflecting contemporary issues in teaching practicum in educational settings today.

We will use this book to promote reflection on the ways in which one's own values, beliefs and life experiences can influence one's professional practice. In many respects, this book also provides a mentoring framework for other pre-service teachers through the sharing of a broad range of issues encountered by pre-service teachers, providing multiple examples of the complexity of classroom practice, and demonstrating the importance of reflective practice. As such, the book is a medium through which fourth-year pre-service teachers and new graduates have shared their valuable experiences and insights into educational dilemmas.

To end this chapter, we would like to share a quote from one of our graduates who contributed to our earlier volume (Geng et al. 2017).

Even though my teaching career is only a short time, I am very happy because during the period I have learned a lot of teaching skills by attending some training in Australia. I am also grateful that I can have a chance to study in the university that made me become who I am today by providing a range of teaching strategies and skills that are very useful for me to use in my teaching practice in Timor (personal communication from Carmen Gomes do Rosário).

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Part II
Preparing Students for Learning

Chapter 2
Reflection on Preparing Students for Learning

Pamela Smith

Abstract This chapter explores the complex nature of the instructional side of teaching, how to best prepare students for learning and get the best outcomes. Teachers bring their own experience of being a learner and their own values to teaching, and they are also confronted with many pedagogical theories about how children learn and how to get the best outcomes. This is reflected in the issues highlighted in the following pre-service teacher chapters. The author in discussing these issues is led to reflect on her own experiences as a learner and a teacher of many years standing. The skill of teaching content and managing the learning outcomes for all students in a classroom setting will be an ongoing challenge for these pre-service teachers and will require ongoing reflection as they strive for the best learning outcomes for a diverse range of student needs.

"So why all the fuss about the DI programme?" writes Jeremy Hunt in Chap. 6 of this book as he tackles the issue of explicit teaching, more specifically the programme Direct Instruction (DI) which has been adopted and implemented by the Department of Education in the Northern Territory as a way of tackling the literacy crisis in remote Aboriginal schools. When I read this question, it reminded me of the many times over my long teaching career I had been led to question why there was yet another new theory about how students learn and about how to get the best learning outcomes.

One day as I sat at my desk at my university workplace, I pondered this question for the umpteenth time and in a moment of stream of consciousness thinking I wrote the following list of pedagogical ideas I had been exposed to as a teacher over my long teaching career: discovery learning, open plan classrooms, student-initiated learning, multi-age classes, group work, activity-based learning, process writing, inventive spelling and whole-language approach, to name a few!!

Reflection can make you realise that you do have educational knowledge and insights gleaned from experience that will help you better understand teaching and learning challenges (Killen 2009). My own journey in critical reflection started with

P. Smith (✉)
Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia
e-mail: pamelajsmith99@gmail.com

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a desire to be an effective teacher. My reflections would be the intuitive daily thinking about something that might have worked well or not worked well and how I could do things better. In the early days of my career, I would not even have thought of this as reflective thinking. As I gained more experience and engaged in professional reading, I began to understand the importance of reflection and recognised my own practice of reflective thinking. I also began to broaden my reflection on more than just my day-to-day experiences to the broader issues of educational reform that at times seemed to threaten my sense of autonomy as a teacher. I had to try to process and balance new educational thinking with what my experience had taught me. I was not a blind follower of change. We as teachers, I felt, were often taken by surprise with little background information given for the benefits of a new programme, resource or pedagogical approach. These changes seem to happen like a wave coming from somewhere unknown but carrying compliant teachers with it. Later again in my teaching career and my career as a university lecturer training pre-service teachers, my critical reflection evolved to consider other broader issues around education, values and ethics.

As I reflect on the following student chapters, I see that these pre-service teachers as they join the teaching force will still be struggling with issues around how to cater for a diverse range of students and which pedagogical approaches to classroom teaching will give the best outcomes. In teacher education, we have to prepare pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to be effective teachers, but also, just as importantly, the ability to be reflective practitioners.

Teachers rely on the personal convictions they have developed from their values, their own educational experience and their experience as teachers over time. They like to feel that they are perfecting what feels right to them in terms of engaging and meeting outcomes for their students. This means they might question the pedagogical theories of the moment.

In the following chapters, we see pre-service teachers reflecting on issues that have affected or challenged them during the course of their teaching degree, and particularly their practicum experiences—issues around creating classroom communities that enable effective learning to take place. Here, these issues have been grouped under the theme of "Preparing Students for Learning".

The skill of teaching content and managing the learning outcomes for all students in a classroom setting is an ongoing challenge for both the neophyte teacher and the experienced practitioner and one that benefits from continual reflection and renewal. What teachers teach (the curriculum) and how they teach it (pedagogy) are central to the value of every lesson. But of course other elements of teaching matter too.

The student papers that form the following chapters have been grouped to reflect the relationship of each issue to preparing students for learning. The sequence of issues follows my own long experience as a classroom teacher. From my experience, teachers tend to start each school term thinking about how they will set up or rearrange their classroom for maximum learning and engagement. This classroom organisation is very much linked to managing behaviour so that effective teaching can take place. The various challenges of differentiating the teaching and learning to cater for the differing abilities and needs of learners become a matter for reflection

and preparation as does the issue of the importance of visual aids as an emotional as well as academic support in the learning process. Integral to all this is the important issue of assessment—how best to assess the learning outcomes of students. The final chapter in this section addresses the issue of homework and parental engagement in and support of the learning programme.

Classroom organisation affects the physical elements of the classroom, making it a more productive environment for its users. Linda Hamilton reflects on this issue in Chap. 3 "How Does Classroom Layout Affect Student Engagement?" She remembers her own primary schooling experience, where structure and discipline were important and the wooden desks were set up in neat rows. This reminds me of my own schooling and early teaching experience, where students sat in desks facing the board so they could easily copy from it and where the blackboard and chalk were the main tools of trade.

Linda reflects on what she has found in her practicum experiences—modern furniture design that lends itself to group seating formations. Linda sees a tension here, as with the flexibility in classroom set up, students may talk more and distract each other, and these low-level behavioural issues need to be managed. Professor Robert Sommer (1977, p. 174) had this to say about choosing a classroom layout:

> The teacher's educational philosophy will be reflected in the layout of the classroom. The teacher should be able to justify the arrangement of desks and chairs on the basis of certain educational goals. There is no ideal classroom layout for all activities.

As Linda concluded in her paper, there were times during instruction when eye-contact with the teacher was important and there were times when cluster tables worked best when doing group work. In my own practice, I often varied the seating arrangements, sometimes rows, sometimes group formations. I always let students choose where to sit at the beginning of the year as it gave me an insight into friendship groups and which students might be on the outer socially. After letting the class settle in, I would organise the seating to better suit the particular class group, making sure no one was excluded. Adjustments were often made each term as I reviewed relationships and adjusted desk arrangements for better learning outcomes.

Classroom management and organisation are intertwined. How the classroom environment is organised influences the behaviour in it. In Chap. 4 "Changing Behaviours within the Classroom" Terri Miller reflects on her experience in what she describes as a low SES secondary school where she experienced issues that arose out of disruptive behaviours. This experience gave her cause to reflect on her own schooling background: she had attended a similar school, came from a divorced family and moved schools a lot, but was not a disruptive student. She enjoyed school, worked hard and did well. This led her to question the influence of family background on behaviour and why background is often given as a reason for disruptive behaviour.

Reflecting on my own early teaching experience in the 1960s, teachers talked about discipline but not so much the term "behaviour management". The only disruptive behaviour I can remember experiencing was talking in class. As the years went by, the behaviours became much more challenging and varied and teaching in many situations became as much about managing behaviour as imparting knowledge. In

my experience, some students could cope with activity-based learning and choice but others needed boundaries and structure to have a safe learning environment.

The proliferation of challenging behaviours in Australian classrooms is supported in research by Sullivan et al. (2014). This and other similar research studies in Australia paint a consistent picture of widespread low-level passive disengagement and disruption. We do not know exactly what causes students in Australia to disengage—it could be problems at home, or subject matter that is too hard or too easy, or poor-quality teaching (Sullivan et al. 2014). This South Australian study showed that the problem is widespread, but much worse in schools with many low socio-economic students. However, students from low SES backgrounds do not inherently misbehave. Many disadvantaged schools have few behavioural problems (Angus et al. 2009).

One of the great challenges in today's diverse classrooms is the need to differentiate the curriculum. Differentiation means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. The goal of a differentiated classroom is to maximise student growth and individual success. In Chap. 5 "Improving Reading Fluency in the Struggling Middle-School Reader", we see Agnieszka Medrecki reflecting on the issue of struggling readers in middle school. Like many of our pre-service teachers when first experiencing their school practicum placements in secondary classrooms, she finds this an unexpected challenge. Reading and comprehending English is essential for success in all content areas. If students lack foundations and strategies necessary to read subject-specific content and textbooks, then their academic success is compromised. She believes they need both fluency and comprehension skills. Secondary teachers need therefore to teach literacy skills as well as their subject area, something they do not always feel confident about. That every teacher is a literacy teacher has been the call of educators for many years who have made their lifework the promotion of reading and writing for middle and high school students (Vacca and Vacca 2002).

After teaching younger students, my first experience teaching Year 6 came as a shock. I remember having expectations about their literacy capacity, but when early in the year standardised testing took place, the results showed a seven-year gap between the highest and lowest literacy scores. Things that concerned me were:

- How do students get that far without adequate literacy skills to access the curriculum?
- How can a teacher remediate and progress other students operating at year level or above?

A positive was peer support—students recognise the struggles of others, and a good teacher will create a classroom culture where all students are valued and respected. Group work has benefits because it can provide peer support and quiet tutoring. Students who struggle worry that they might not cope when they transition to high school or middle school. I remember a student asking me why there was no examination at the end of primary school. Why was promotion automatic?

The challenge is to connect the teaching of reading and writing to the rest of the secondary school improvement agenda, treating literacy instruction as a key part of the broader effort to ensure that all students develop the knowledge and skill they need to succeed in life after high school (Heller and Greenleaf 2007). Agnieszka came

to the conclusion that teachers need to find effective strategies for trying to close the literacy gap in the middle years, and one important factor was the importance of regular reading in class as well as home reading.

Closing the gap or tailoring instruction to meet individual needs is also the theme of Chap. 6, where Jeremy Hunt, as mentioned in my introduction, tackles the issue of explicit teaching, and more specifically the programme Direct Instruction. Jeremy asked the question "Why all the fuss about the DI programme?" when he found himself working as a teacher assistant in a remote Indigenous school, a new experience for him. He admits he had low expectations of the students, but he came to recognise that they were "smart kids". Jeremy's acknowledgement of low expectations is something that Chris Sarra writes about: Sarra's (2014) work in developing the Stronger Smarter Philosophy (a belief in the transformative power of higher expectations) has brought consideration of the need for high expectations to the forefront of discussions about Indigenous education in Australia. In any case, the school Jeremy found himself in had adopted the DI programme, and although students did not particularly like the programme they took pride in realising that they were making good progress.

When I began my teaching career in the 60s, the teacher was the centre of the classroom and teaching was explicit. Motivating learners was still important, so you needed to engage students, but the teaching was explicit and sequential with an emphasis on practice. This would now be considered traditional teacher-directed learning and is often derided as "drill and kill". I must admit I found it hard to adjust later on to new notions of student-led learning and activity-based learning. Does this work for all students?

The teacher's role of directing the learning was challenged by the idea of teacher-facilitated child-centred learning, or "the guide on the side". I could ask the question, "What's wrong with explicit teaching?" Have we been misguided in abandoning teacher-directed methods of learning? Rather than dismiss explicit teaching as "drill and kill", why is there not more research done into how to make explicit teaching more effective.

In Chap. 7, Brooke Trudgen looks at the place of visuals in the classroom. While she looks specifically at visuals in a special education setting, visuals are important in any setting. Brooke came to feel that visual prompts did not just have academic benefits: They could help students feel less anxious and more engaged in their learning. Brooke also felt that visual aids could play a part in a student's readiness to learn.

Visuals are used in classrooms in many ways. In addition to the many visuals displayed as an adjunct to learning, visual aids can be used as prompts for classroom routines and behavioural expectations. They can allow students to express themselves (such as through emotions charts) and can help them better manage their tasks. We sometimes just accept visuals in the classroom, especially in early childhood classrooms, without thinking about why they are important.

I still remember the final farewell lecture at my graduation years ago. In addition to being advised about our status and expected behaviours, especially if we were sent to country placements, we were told to dress in colourful clothing as children like colour! I remember spending a lot of time creating thematic displays with my

students and often decorating the classroom to set the scene for a unit of work. However, I agree with Brooke that in addition to the academic value of visuals, they can have a more practical value: "Visuals are a lifeline to help students through the day".

In Chap. 8, Alison Bosnakis is also interested in visual learning, focusing this time on visual literacy in relation to authentic assessment. As a visual arts pre-service teacher, Alison was aware of the literacy demands of the visual arts. She says that visual literacy is becoming increasingly important as students are immersed in visual images in this digital age. As a student in high school, Alison felt that she could express herself through the visual arts more so than verbally. She reflects on the issue of critical reflection and analysis and the link to authentic assessment.

Assessment and the associated feedback are an integral part of instruction as it determines whether the goals of education have been met. Authentic assessment differs from conventional assessment by asking students to prove their comprehension of learned concepts and display in-depth understanding versus superficial learning. In authentic assessment, practical, meaningful tasks are designed that are reflective of real-world challenges. The challenge with this type of assessment is that it can be more time-consuming and may require greater funding. In her paper, Alison has attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of these approaches on improving student achievement and engagement in middle school years in Australia.

One issue that seems to come up with every cohort of pre-service teachers in the research unit offered in the final year of teacher education study at Charles Darwin University is the issue of homework. Why is there such a debate about homework now when once it was accepted as an integral part of one's schooling experience and an important part of the parent/school relationship? Mikaila Mangohig tackles this issue in the last chapter in this section, Chap. 9.

The context for Mikaila's reflection is middle and senior secondary school. Her teaching area is mathematics. After reflecting on her own mixed feelings about homework throughout her school years, she examines the relationship between homework in primary and secondary school. Is one a preparation for the other? While she comes to see a positive value in homework, she believes the tasks need to be differentiated to cater for differing student needs. Some students benefit from the practice of skills, while others need extension. There is benefit, she feels, in regular revision for embedding learning in memory.

In my own schooling experience, I did not question the benefit of homework. I remember sitting with my father at night, while he helped me with my maths homework, particularly problem-solving. I remember this as a precious time in my relationship with him. In high school, the work was beyond my parents, as they had not had the opportunity to complete their secondary schooling, but they encouraged the habit of homework.

As a parent, I valued the opportunity to see what my children were learning at school and helping them with their projects, often learning alongside them. I remember a parent thanking me for giving regular homework to my Year 6 students, as she said it stood her daughter in good stead with homework expectations in high school.

In my experience, homework can help children develop good habits and attitudes. Homework helps children learn to be responsible and gives them a sense of control and accomplishment. It can teach children to work independently and to manage time and meet deadlines, and it encourages self-discipline and responsibility. It must however be acknowledged that not all families have the conditions, time or necessary knowledge to help their offspring with homework requirements.

Teaching is complex. The seven issues highlighted in this section are but a sample of the issues which teachers need to grapple with in preparing students for learning—the instructional side of teaching. Mastering the instructional component is just one part of the whole complex art of teaching. Teachers who are skilled in the instructional component of teaching, being able to communicate necessary skills and concepts in a way students understand, can create a positive learning environment for all students. Effective teachers are the most important contributing factor to student achievement. The pre-service teachers in the following chapters have reflected on some of the real challenges in classroom instruction. Reflection is a long process, the benefits of which will help them become more effective practitioners, develop positive relationships and deliver better learning outcomes for the students they will teach.

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Chapter 3
Banish the Graveyard: How Does Classroom Layout Affect Students' Engagement?

Linda Hamilton

Abstract This chapter investigates the impact of classroom layout on children's engagement within learning. A variety of classroom layouts within today's educational environments, from traditional seats and rows to alternative layouts with variable seating options and without tables were investigated. I discussed with teachers their motivations for changes to traditional classroom layouts to interpret their reasoning for such change. Every classroom layout is unique, with teachers needing to contextualize multiple factors in order to create a layout that works for their own pedagogical style as well as the students' preferred learning environment. Educators need to give careful consideration when deciding upon classroom layout so as to maximize potential engagement of student learning, which may mean looking beyond the traditional classroom layout.

> Journal entry, 3rd May 2016:
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> On the first day of my placement before the day began, I stood in wonderment when entering the Year 2/3 classroom. This was to be my learning space for the next 20 days. My class comprised of 25 students. How was this classroom going to work? I had never encountered a classroom that had a picnic table as a desk for students to work at, also a coffee table with soft cushions around it, a couch and some beanbags. There were only two clusters of tables that would accommodate eight children, and the other seating was more like walking into a bar. Students could sit around the edge of two sides of the classroom. This does not sound out of the ordinary, but the difference was that their backs faced the interactive smart board and the teacher. I can remember thinking, "This will never work".

Introduction

I grew up in a small rural town in the southeast of South Australia, 400 km from Adelaide. I went to a Catholic primary school, the only private school in our town. My schooling started in 1969, and I completed my 12 years of schooling in 1981.

L. Hamilton (✉)
Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia
e-mail: lindahamilton64@gmail.com

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