ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolving "personal practical knowledge" of teaching of seven teachers. Personal practical knowledge is a complex practically oriented set of understandings which teachers actively use to shape and direct the work of teaching (Elbaz, 1983). The teachers' knowledge bases, drawn ultimately from their experiences, give shape to their world, and allow them to function in it. There are many ways of characterizing the teachers' experiential orientation. Schutz and Luckmann (1973) suggest that we look for form and degree of spontaneity the teacher manifests in teaching, at the level of attentiveness they bring, at the number of different features of their experience to which the teacher attends, and at the time what perspectives the teachers have on their work.

My study draws from my experience, a teacher-educator and researcher, involved in pre-service and in-service training of teachers, and is grounded in "action research". It has involved a search for the effective means—a set of methods for understanding teacher's personal practical knowledge. Earlier studies on "personal practical knowledge" have resorted to "either" / "or" format, whereas in the present study we have combined various qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The first claim being made is that teachers do go beyond the requirements of a training programme and are identifying problems and searching for solutions. Teachers involved in formal inservice programmes would quite naturally focus on externally defined requirements initially. However they are capable of going beyond this level into locating, articulating and responding to their problems.
The second strong claim made is the importance of “self-reflection”. My own involvement as a teacher educator and practitioner is part of the research process (Throughout this study, my role has been that of a researcher as well as a “teacher-learner”, like my “subjects”). Thirdly, “a collaborative culture” is a strong ground for “teacher-culture”.

One of the criteria used in selecting the teacher trainees constituting our sample of “subjects” was that they would represent different regions and different levels. Second, they would have feasibility and access and would be able to maintain contact with us. A further consideration was that the “collaborative action-research projects” that we would do with them would be relevant in their contexts, that would help in the process of solving their own problems.

We got in touch with numerous teacher trainees in the field and by consulting our records for admission to PGCTE (1995-96 batch, 1996-97 batch, and 1997-98 batch). Those sources were used to suggest candidates that fit the selection criteria, resulting in a list of 60 teacher-trainees. We started our contacts with these 60 volunteers both by writing, and by phone. 36 of them provided information, based on our initial two questionnaires. We have analysed the data from these two questionnaires both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In order to find an answer to the main question, “What are teachers’ Concerns?” a survey of teachers’ concerns was done sending questionnaires by post. One questionnaire had questions on personal details, their present work place, and their “narratives of experience as a teacher”. The other
had a list of teachers’ concerns that had emerged from my semi-structured open-ended interviews with them. This list of teachers’ concerns is also open-ended, and the participants were requested to add issues which were relevant in their context. It was only after negotiating with some teacher-trainees regarding their “order of priority” that we decided on investigating seven concerns for our “collaborative action research projects”, following “case-study design” (Yin:1993).

Therefore this study is organized in the format of

Phase I : A Review of the Literature
Phase II : A Survey of Teachers’ Concerns
Phase III : Case studies based on collaborative action research projects

Each of the case studies goes through the following action research cycle:

1. Problem Identification
2. Preliminary Investigation
3. Hypotheses / Premises
4. Plan Intervention
5. Outcome
6. Reporting

Phase IV : Teachers’ Beliefs as emerging from their Narratives.

This phase emerges from Phase III. We have interpreted teachers’ perceptions and beliefs by using image, metaphor, personal philosophy, cycles, rhythms and narrative unity as our research tools. We have
interpreted the “narratives” by keeping in mind the following questions:

a. Why do the teachers identify these narratives as critical incidents?
b. What views of students do they have?
c. What are their views of teaching / subject-matter knowledge / content of teaching?
d. What are their views regarding other teachers / colleagues?
e. What views of themselves do they have? Have they changed over the years?
f. What are their views regarding milieu / context?

The Plan of the Thesis is as Follows:

In the First Chapter, is introduced the topic and presented the context and background. Also presented is the design of the study and the organization. Then we discuss the major philosophical paradigms in teacher education, particularly the concepts of life-long education, problem-posing concept of education, experiential aspects of knowledge, knowing-in-action and reflection-on action.

We highlight how understanding the language of our teacher-trainees is as important as their understanding of our language. It is a “temporal process”, each of our life-experiences shape how we talk, use the language, and tell “stories”. As members of this group, the “teacher-fraternity”, we have been able to empathize with the life experiences of this group.
In the Second Chapter, we discuss the origin of the ideas in the humanistic paradigm, phenomenology and the constructivist paradigm. Then we review the literature on the domains of teacher knowledge, particularly on knowledge of learners and learning, knowledge of general pedagogy, knowledge of curriculum, knowledge of content, knowledge of context, and knowledge of self. We discuss the differences between paradigmatic forms of knowledge and narrative forms of knowledge. Gradually, we came to the realm of teachers' thinking, beliefs and decision making and delved in-depth into the research on teachers' narratives and "personal practical knowledge".

The work of Elbaz (1983) is taken as a point of reference. We cannot speak of teacher's knowledge as fixed. Teachers' theoretical orientation shapes their practical knowledge in an important way. The case study done by Elbaz provides a striking example of the teachers' socially oriented use of language. Sarah was a teacher who strongly disliked being in a position of power in her relations with students. She found a new context for her work in the school's reading centre. The centre constituted a smaller social framework which was congenial for Sarah than the school as a whole for the sharing of skills with students. She also fulfilled a personal need to be in a position of service to students and other teachers. Implicit in the situational and personal orientation of the teacher's knowledge is its experiential base. In summary, Sarah's practical knowledge was composed of theoretical, practical and personal fragments. According to Elbaz, there are three ways by which practical knowledge is organized or held: through rules of practice, practical principles and images. Sarah wanted to have a "window onto the kids and what they're thinking". Equally, she wanted to "open her own window wide open".
We have also adopted the position of Connelly and Clandinin (1988) that personal practical knowledge is a term designated to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher’s past experience, in the teacher’s present mind and body, and in the future plans and action.

(Connelly and Clandinin, 1988: 25)

Their theory of experience is derived from John Dewey’s *Experience and Education* (1938). Connelly, Clandinin and He (1997) went through a variety of steps in their methodology: collection of field texts, interviews, conversations, narrative mode of inquiry, and made an in-depth understanding of the teachers through a study of image, rule, personal philosophy, metaphor, cycles, rhythms, and narrative unity.

Helen Christensen’s view of ‘Personal Practical Knowledge’ has been defined as “Experiential” (evolving from experience), “biographical” (embodied in personal history) and “historical” (linked to a particular cultural context). In its practical sense, it is tied to decision making or “knowing-in-action” (Schon, 1983).

We have tried out some of these frameworks in studying the “narratives” and “interviews” of our teacher trainees.

In the Third Chapter, we talk about the *methods* that we had used in *data-collection* and *data-analysis*. We have used multiple-sources of evidence, namely, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and “narratives of experience” both in spoken and in written form. We have observed these
teachers at their places of work, and have had interviews using the “stimulated-recall” techniques based on audio-recording and “field notes”, this has helped us to identify teachers' decisions in the classrooms, their “reflection-in-action” and “reflections-on-action”.

We also discuss the nature of our data, with particular references to photographs, “sketches”, and “paintings” that have been used to make our descriptions vivid and display our thoughts. One of the most important lessons in Miles and Huberman's Qualitative Data Analysis (1994) is to “think display”. In my study, “graphic presentation offers an alternative to prose not only for conveying information but for dramatizing or emphasizing particular aspects of a study. Table, charts, diagrams and figures are one way to do it”. (Wolcott, 1994 : 31) Photographs and paintings are “visual facts”, that can be presented with or without interpretation.

In the Third Chapter, we have also presented a pilot case study, that of Teacher B, and have explored her vision and purpose as she worked towards “professional socialisation of teachers with parents and students”. We have demonstrated how we did colour-coding while analysing the interviews or narratives, and how these case studies are developed in keeping with the steps of an “action-research spiral”.

In the Fourth Chapter, we have analysed the findings from a survey on teachers' concerns. Here are some concerns that the teachers have prioritised:

1. Tackling the problems of weak learners
2. Providing feedback on learners' writing to enable them to take feedback seriously
3. Assessing one's own performance to overcome learner apathy
4. Using L1 as a resource
5. Improving learners' proficiency in English with special reference to listening
6. Changing one's attitude towards teaching
7. Providing exposure to English outside the classroom.

Similar concerns had triggered their 'thinking', and the teachers had added a lot of issues concerning all the problems, listed in the questionnaire.

They have worded them as follows:

- Considering proficiency in the mother tongue as an aid, not a hindrance
- Exploring professional socialization between colleagues, students, and parents
- Realizing learner potential and aptitude

Therefore the fourth chapter answers our first question:

- What are Teachers' Concerns?

In the Fifth Chapter, we have discussed four out of seven case-studies, based on collaborative action-research projects. One of the case studies had been dealt with in Chapter Three. Therefore we have summarised five case-studies on the whole. It is the local situation and frame of reference that is important in each of the case studies, so generalizability to other contexts may not be a major issue. But the way in which these teachers use the resources, the type of help they seek, our intervention strategies, and the implications of these in their professional growth, and in our teacher education programmes are of relevance in this study.
In the first case study, which centred on the issue "tackling the problem of weak learners", we discovered some weak learners' "listening" strategies and "reading" strategies through their "verbal reports", and collaboratively sorted them out to solve them. The data were analysed within a "personal practical knowledge" framework—through a gathering of 'threads'.

In the second case study, which centred on the issue "providing feedback on writing to enable them to take feedback seriously", we discussed different techniques of providing positive constructive feedback and then requested the teachers to provide feedback on compositions not only through written comments but also supplementing them with oral comments on audio-cassettes. The children gave their impressions on this feedback through an interview-schedule, and could mark the difference between the type of feedback they had been receiving so far, and this variety.

The teachers had added a lot of issues concerning learners that were relevant in their context. In Chapter Four, we have given a list of these issues that have triggered their thinking. One of them was "Learner apathy to lessons". One of the teachers, Teacher A, decided to assess her own performance to gauge whether that was one of causes for learner apathy. We have discussed the stance she had taken in the third case study.

The fourth case study is concerned with the issue of "Using L1 as a resource". We share the success stories of two teachers who have used "L1 as a resource" in their classes.

The sixth Chapter has examined the original purpose in the light of the data assembled. We have been able to prove that teachers do go beyond
the requirements of the training programme, and are identifying problems and are searching for solutions. The second claim that we make is that collaboration has come to comprise a meta paradigm of educational and organizational change in the postmodern age. Thirdly, our own involvement as practitioners is part of this research process. We can analyse our own "narratives" and find a "voice" with which to record our development.

It is claimed that we have been able to fulfil most of the criteria, proposed by Allwright (1993) in integrating our research with pedagogy. In this chapter, we also provide a rationale for mixing methods and for our action-research spiral. We are aware of the constraints of maintaining "collegiality" and "continuity" in any "Collaborative-Project" done longitudinally. But if we have "trust in processes" and "abstract systems", along with "mutual-trust-in-people", then we would be able to apply those "processes" and "strategies" to solve our problems, just like Teacher F has done in one of the case studies. Teacher F believed in Hosenfeld's technique of studying "learning strategies", so she can apply it in the case of other learners and not wait for "planned intervention" from outside.

Finally, the implications of this study for teacher development are discussed. Suggestions for further research are offered. The discussion ends with some thoughts on Self-Reflection.