PEDAGOGICAL DILEMMA IN TEACHER EDUCATION: BRIDGING THE THEORY PRACTICE GAP

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore how teacher educators are preparing pre-service teachers to "learn from practice" which the policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education aspires to and which has its focus on campus-based teaching with the aim of narrowing the practice-theory divide.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative approach through a phenomenological lens, provided opportunities for teacher educators, pre-service final year students and in-service teachers to share personal perspectives of their training experiences. Semi-structured and focus group interviews were specifically structured to solicit perceptions of the practical component of the course.

Findings: Pre-service teachers feel that teacher educators are "out of touch" with what happens in classrooms and are not adequately trained to prepare them for the world of teaching. There is evidence that a misalignment exists between how training occurs on campus and what students are facing in the school classroom and this needs to be bridged. Campus courses should be carefully constructed and coordinated with field experiences to effectively guide and support student teacher learning.

Originality: Empirical evidence is provided by the most eligible stakeholders i.e., teacher educators, pre-service teachers and in-service teachers, who were able to present their objective and practical views on the realities of their experiences with pre-service teachers' preparedness to merge theory and practice successfully in a classroom.

Keywords: "learning from practice", on-campus preparation, professional development, reflective practice, theory-practice relationship, experiential learning, theory/practice debate

INTRODUCTION

The process of preparing teachers should include much more than just presenting pedagogical

approaches and theoretical frames in lecture halls. “Theory and practice,” “research and application,” “ideal and real,” “thought and action” ... every scholar-teacher knows that neither half is viable without the other. Theories die if they remain disconnected from practice; practice uninspired by theory is lifeless” (Berger 2002). Teacher educators need to be conscious of this growing disjuncture between theory and practice and work towards bridging that gap through reflection on “theory offered in the programmes” and “practice on the ground”. Aleccia (2011) suggests that for teacher educators to do this, there is a need for them to remain constantly aware of the culture of classrooms.

Björck and Johansson (2019, 1363) refers to the theory–practice relationship as a “generic term for the relationship between the campus and work placement-based components of higher education”. The ongoing debate, according to them, seeks to find a solution to “overcome this dualistic approach to this relationship” where both theory and practice-based learning is viewed as “isolated components”. Rose (2020) suggests work-integrated learning (WIL) in higher education as a means to narrow the gap. The application of a strategy where students go to campus to learn theory and into the workplace to learn practice is identified to assist in overcoming this dualistic approach.

“Teacher education finds itself in a critical state” (Korthagen 2001, 2). Many stakeholders, which include parents, teachers and politicians, are discontented with the traditional approaches still used in teacher education and greater pressure has been applied, in many countries, to move towards a more school-based programme (Korthagen 2001). Consequently, the responsibility of teacher education in these countries has been charged to schools where “training on the job” has become their responsibility. Korthagen (2001) further argue that this action has endorsed the argument that teacher education programmes “fail in preparing prospective teachers for the realities of the classroom”. Smagorinsky, Cook, and Johnson (2003, 1004) describe teacher educators as “aloof within their ivory towers” not preparing students enough on-campus to empower them to take up their tasks in the classroom. Gravett (2012, 3) argues that teacher educators are not able to teach students all they need to know and that there are aspects that newly qualified teachers can only learn “on the job”. However, she purports that it is “our task to deliver competent teachers, that is, teachers with a starting and growth competence who have the ability to continue to develop once they enter the teaching profession”. The purpose of this study is to explore how teacher educators are preparing students to “learn from practice” which the policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education (MRTEQ) (DHET 2011) aspires to and which has its focus on campus-based teaching with the aim of narrowing the practice-theory divide. Thus, the research question: Are teacher training institutions providing adequate on-campus preparation for pre-service teachers to take up their task as students during their

teaching practice and consequently as competent teachers in the classroom?

This article will comprise of the dynamics which forms the basis of professional development. Firstly, we will discuss the more general arguments which define the theory practice debate and its place in teacher education. We will continue to discuss, within the context of teacher education, experiential learning and practice; work-integrated learning and the culture of classrooms.

THEORY PRACTICE DEBATE

Contemporary discussions deliberate on "whether it is theory *or* practice, or a *reciprocal* relationship between them that forms the basis for professional education" (Björck and Johansson 2019, 1364). In modern universities, according to Raelin (2016), there is a tendency towards a curriculum design that favours theory over practice. Björck and Johansson (2019, 1364), however, purport that in the current debate it is "common to hail the value of practice and criticize the traditional dualistic view that theory is the basis for professional education". Schön (1983) professes that the "epistemology of practice" needs to be reversed because the foundation of professional knowledge are the skills permeating this professional domain. Schön's (1983) reflective practice, according to Björck and Johansson (2019, 1364), refers to the "reflecting in" and "reflecting on" the daily, random challenges presented to professionals as the "best way of acquiring professional knowledge". However, there is an argument presented that reversing the position of practice, as the foundation of professional knowledge, is not the ultimate solution, rather Björck and Johansson's (2019, 1364) research "embraces the reciprocal approach to the theory – practice relationship" in which both theory and practice assume equal status and appreciate a mutualistic relationship to further refine the domain of higher education.

The theory-practice divide is dependent on "linking the theoretical insights about the professional development of teachers with the practice in teacher education". The amalgamation of these two modalities should procure the development of "a pedagogy of teacher education that is both empirically based and practically orientated" (Korthagen, Loughran, and Russel 2006, 1022). While the theoretically based knowledge is generally traditional in nature and university based, the experience-based knowledge is more school based and more focused "in" and "on" classroom realities (Darling-Hammond 2006; Korthagen et al. 2006). A desperate need exists to "infuse more practical skills into the teacher training programme without losing the theoretical foundation that helps teachers understand how children learn" (Garland 2012, 1). The acquisition of these skills will assist pre-service teachers to adapt to the numerous situations they are exposed to in the classroom.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND PRACTICE

Essential to any study programme is the need to significantly integrate some form of experiential learning to afford opportunities for students to apply theory into practice, subsequently narrowing the theory-practice gap (Coll, Lay, and Zegwaard 2002; Roland 2017). Through a research lens, the concept of experiential learning is "a means to enhance student learning" (Roland 2017), "where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (McCarthy 2016), "a concrete experience followed by reflection" (Badyal and Singh 2017) and "learning, change, and growth seen to be facilitated best by an integrated process that begins with here and now experiences" (Kruger, Kruger, and Suzuki 2015). Experiential learning has been foregrounded as the main donor to success in higher education. Roland (2017, 2982), an experiential learning specialist, discusses the most significant benefits of this practice to be:

> 1. "Experiential learning provides students with opportunities to critically engage in learning – providing students with a deeper and more meaningful understanding of theoretical knowledge beyond the textbook";
> 2. "Provides mentoring and guided navigation of the realities of the workplace – the ability to successfully traverse the nuanced and at times, problematic realities of the workplace; and most importantly",
> 3. "Allows for the development of a thoughtful, personal commitment to professionalism through reflective practice intrinsically, allowing students to become agents of their own learning characterized by a meta-cognitive awareness of their development as novice professionals".

Badyal and Singh (2017) describe experiential learning and work-based learning as conceptual processes, where learning is based on experience, and likens it to a model rather than a theory. McCarthy (2016) agrees and refers to it as a cyclical process where learners are required to experience each stage in preparation for the emergence of new learning. Hawtrey (2007, 144) stated that "the incorporation of active, participatory learning opportunities ... is sometimes called situational learning ... which can clearly be seen in Kolb's learning cycle".

In Kolb's (1984) model, four stages articulate the process of experiential learning: stage one denotes the learners' actual concrete experience and information acquisition which leads to stage two in which learners now take time out to think and reflect on their experience and information gathered. Stage three sees the cognitive creation of concepts which are directly applicable to the experience and also more generalized thoughts and ideas about the experience. Finally, in stage four the learner should now be able to transfer the knowledge acquired in the previous stages to new settings or situations.

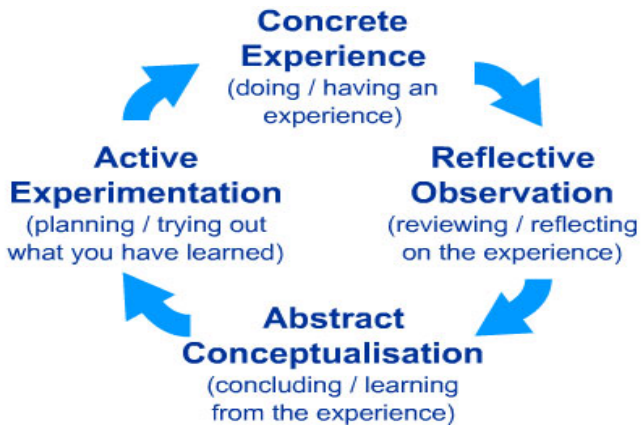

Figure 1: Kolb's learning cycle (1984)

> "Experiential learning, or active, involved learning, learning by doing, or interactive learning requires that students do not passively acquire knowledge rather the student is actively involved in the learning process. Supporters of experiential learning believe that it promotes greater interest in the subject material, enhances intrinsic learning satisfaction, increases understanding and retention of course material, develops the desire and ability to be continuous learners, improves communication, and interpersonal, problem solving, analytical thinking, and critical thinking skills of the students." (Brickner and Etter 2008).

University work, according to Gravett (2012), focuses mainly on factual knowledge, conceptual knowledge, principles and other frameworks regarding phenomena and this leaves university learning in the category of "learning about". "Learning to be", however, refers to the development of the "competent practitioner ... students' conceptual knowledge in the field of education, knowledge that they can 'declare'". In addition to the focus on "learning to be" teacher educators should also foreground "learning about" referring to the experiential opportunities created, which should be embedded in "learning to be". Kolb's (1984) model stresses the importance of the convergence of the "learning about" with "learning to be" with teacher educators providing guided reflection throughout the learning process. Flessner (2012) purports that teacher educators have the responsibility to more tightly couple university-based experiences and field work through making "more explicit connections between academic content and pedagogical practice". Assignments and projects in theory must be closely related to methods courses to ensure that pre-service teachers are able to make the connections between what was taught in university classrooms and their experiences in the school classroom. The researcher lens reveals that active involvement in experiential learning enhances the process of learning. "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand" (Confucius 551 BC to 479 BC).

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is coined as the "umbrella term which captures student activities that attempt to integrate academic programs with practical application in the workplace" (Khampirat and McRae 2016). The purpose of WIL is, therefore, to connect theory to practice with a focus on how theory and practice can be integrated, how they can be utilized in a reciprocal relationship and how the theory practice gap can be narrowed (Björck and Johansson 2019). To effectively achieve its purpose WIL encourages the use of critical learning theories and pedagogies which include experiential-based learning, immersive learning, and transformative learning (Lim et al. 2020).

The Revised Policy on MRTEQ in South Africa promotes WIL which includes working from a variety of contexts: "drawing from case studies, video records, lesson observations, etc., in order to theorise practice and form a basis for learning in practice" (DHET 2011, 10). This should take place in university classrooms and school settings and should contain "a small component of service learning in community settings" (DHET 2011, 13). These community settings are used as a learning resource where students are able to develop work-related skills.

Parallel to this is the need for students to remain engaged in applying foundational and theoretical knowledge while acquiring work-related skills. Very often, according to Wren and Wren (2009), pre-service teachers experience great difficulty in making a smooth transition from the university classroom to the school classroom, with confidence, during teaching practice. Preservice teachers are not able to make the connections between their learning in university classrooms and what they experience in the school classrooms (Flessner 2012). This difficulty experienced in the shift results from the failure of an integration of theory and practice that is relevant and significant within their course in university classrooms. Wren and Wren (2009) feel strongly that "a case could be made that the best learning environment is created when these two learning modalities are integrated within a course rather than partitioned throughout multiple courses in the curriculum". Gravett (2012, 6), agrees that teacher educators should "generate the concerns by creating suitable concrete experiences for students. This can be done in coursework through using, for example, authentic classroom materials, videotapes of teaching and learning, cases and by invoking students' own experiences as children and learners in schools." Across the teacher education curriculum active learning models should include several teaching modes, e.g., learning by doing, where learning takes place through "observing, reflecting, sharing, and applying course material in classroom and practice settings" (Wren and Wren 2009). They further purport that it should be the teacher educator's desire to "balance theory/experience, classroom/practice, student/teacher, roles ... over the entire curriculum" (Wren and Wren 2009, 263).

CULTURE OF CLASSROOMS

Darling-Hammond (2006), endorses the necessity for traditional teacher-education programmes to undergo "wrenching change" with regard to developing practical opportunities on-campus and in schools. Currently many of these programmes offer "front loaded coursework in isolation from practice, adding a short dollop of student teaching to the end of the programme – often in classrooms that do not model the best practice". National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE 2010, 2) states that "teaching is, like medicine, a profession of practice – prospective teachers must be prepared to become expert practitioners who know how to use the knowledge of their profession to advance student learning ... in order to achieve this we must place practice at the centre of teacher preparation". Dewey (1938, 25) concurs that experience is evidently the "shaping force" in teacher education, but further argues that "the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other."

Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) concede that although teaching experience can be seen to enhance the learning experience, it can also, especially in the South African context, prove to be quite perplexing. Evidence of this presents itself more often in disadvantaged schools where teachers have diverse expertise and qualifications, where there is a lack of resources and minimal basic school facilities, and where behavioural management challenges exist as a result of geographical locations and access to schools. These challenges present teaching experience in a negative light and can have far reaching effects on student performance.

Korthagen et al. (2006), in his research, conducted a comparative study of teacher-education programmes across three continents. Their results show that while the organisational structure was important, the central factor still remains the question of how to manage learning from practice. The common features that emerged for all three countries are: curriculum methods subjects, educational foundational subjects, and school experience (fieldwork). "Teacher educators in all three programs share the assertion that one does not learn through experience, but through reflection on experience and through interaction with others" (Korthagen et al. 2006, 1025). "Dumping" students into schools for the sake of providing practical experience becomes meaningless unless there is constant reflection on experiences and they are guided by theory prior to their field experiences. Korthagen et al. (2006, 1025) substantiates:

> "To fully illuminate the dynamics of a teaching situation, student teachers need opportunities to understand what is involved in planning the teaching, doing the teaching and reflecting on the

> teaching. Then they need to link all of these to the relationship between the teaching and the concurrent learning."

The availability of school classrooms for teaching experience in not enough, claims Darling-Hammond (2006). She maintains and concurs with Dewey (1938) that to "pay attention to the relationship between experience and education" is where the value of the experience can be dignified. Darling-Hammond (2006), through her research, found that "immersing teachers in the materials of practice and working on particular concepts using these materials, ... analysing samples of work, videotapes of teachers and students in action and cases of teaching and learning with reflection and case analysis of the experience", will create opportunity for the development and provision of adequate tools for professional learning and development. Concrete experiences, Gravett (2012) agrees, will serve as "the basis of what is known as guided reflection". She continues to explain that in the process of immersing students in "materials of practice" teacher educators should use examples of their own practice and experience to inspire a hunger for further learning through creating opportunities to ask questions like: "How did you handle that?" and "What would you do in a case like that?" It is during these dialogues that theory and practice merge and becomes more easily applicable to the real cases they face in a practical situation.

METHODOLOGY

In the search to understand the nature of the pedagogical dilemma: theory versus practice within the context of pre-service teacher training, a qualitative approach was used. This study allowed teacher educators, pre-service teachers and in-service teachers to view teacher education programmes through a phenomenological lens, which provided opportunities for them to share personal perspectives of their training experiences. This approach allowed for the collection of in-depth and detailed descriptions of their experiences in the lecture halls during "on-campus teaching" and "school teaching experience" and how teacher education programmes aligned these two modalities to narrow the theory, practice gap.

The sample included four nationally approved teacher education institutions (TEI) in South Africa. Two of the sampled sites are the largest providers of initial teacher education. The information was obtained from 8 teacher educators, four focus groups (F/G) involving final-year pre-service teachers and two in-service teachers. Purposive sampling, which focused on particular characteristics of the participants, was used to ensure the solicitation of significant information regarding their training and to achieve the objectives of the study (Kumar 1999, 162). The lecturers (teacher educators) "lived experience" in their daily task of training teachers, the students "lived experience" as the recipients of this teaching and in-service

teachers who mentored students, were found to be equipped to share their perceptions of the training and their experiences. Welman, Kruger, and Mitchell (2005, 69) purports this sample to be representative of the population, trusting their "experiences, ingenuity and previous research to deliberately obtain units of analysis".

The most logical technique for collecting data in exploratory research, according to Gray (2009, 370), are interviews. In this article fourteen interviews were used, creating opportunities for participants to express themselves in dialogue and not committing to writing for fear of a breach in confidentiality.

Semi-structured interviews were used to "obtain in-depth information ... thoughts, reasoning, motivations and feelings" about the training of teachers from lecturers and in-service teachers (Johnson and Christensen 2004, 183). The questions were specifically structured to solicit their perceptions of the practical component of the course. Focus-group interviews were also used to gain information from students about their perceptions of the practical aspects of their training. Johnson and Christensen (2004, 186) states that focus-group interviews "complement other forms of data collection ... providing in-depth information". According to Hennink (2010, 208), focus-group interviews allow participants to "describe, discuss, debate, disagree and defend" their views' of their experiences of the training. Homogenous groups were used for purposes of compatibility, however, King and Horrocks (2011, 66) indicate that this may restrict discussions around aspects and positions from which they are viewed.

Data analysis commenced with the analysis of one example and then moving to a more general categorization. An inductive approach was used and the themes that emerged from the initial case were connected and a coherent ordered table of themes was produced. Analysis of other cases took place and a more analytical ordering of themes developed. After analyzing all transcripts, the themes were clustered and over-arching themes were selected. The study is supported by Maxwell's (1992) theory of understanding validity in qualitative research. Descriptive and interpretive validity as well as generalisibility were focused on. The combination of triangulation and communication validity was used to ensure validity of results.

Ethical clearance was obtained from Faculty of Education and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology for all participants. Informed consent was signed by all participants. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were free to withdraw at any stage during the study (Dakwa 2015). Participants were assured of full confidentiality and anonymity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There is an assumption that knowledge and practices taught in pre-service teacher education

programmes are sufficient for developing professional practice needed in the teaching field. However, "a widely discerned problem lies in the fact that there is often a huge disparity between the types of skills and knowledge taught in pre-service programmes and the realities of workplace practice" (Allen and Wright 2014, 136). The following two themes emerged from this study and are discussed below: Teacher educators and school experience; and connecting theory to practice. The evidence will be provided for each theme followed by a discussion.

Teacher educators and school experience

The findings in this research show that 85 per cent of students felt that teacher educators are not adequately equipped to teach students to deal with 21st century classrooms because some of them "were last in a classroom 23 years ago. How are they going to be able to relate to us what is happening in classrooms today?" (F/G 1: TEI 3).

Another student's (F/G 2: TEI 1) diagnosis was "we think they are out of touch with reality. They say one thing but it happens differently in a classroom. They just don't have the experience". "Lecturers must try and get themselves in schools because most of them ... come straight from studying their honours or master's to become lecturers," stated another respondent (F/G 4: TEI 1). She felt it was pointless being a student at university when in essence they still had to "teach themselves how to deal with children in a class, how to approach a lesson and how to do the admin".

A significantly low 12.5 per cent of the lecturers felt that all teacher educators should update their classroom experience because "if you do not have teaching experience", one lecturer stated, "how would you know what classrooms or learners are like? Unless you know, it's very difficult to prepare teachers adequately". Lecturer P (TEI 2) agreed that if we were serious about improving quality, "some staff members should go out into the schools and teach for a term to really see what it was like and to see whether they were adequately preparing students to go into that kind of environment".

Behr and Temmen (2012, 65) confirm that students who take the opportunity to spend time in classrooms have indicated that "what they see rarely corresponds to what they have learned in the university ... mentors/supervisors in schools do not act according to the principles that their university instructors have emphasized as important". The focus of this study is on "learning from practice" which includes the knowledge and practice bases developed on campus through the teaching of theory and methodology for which teacher educators are responsible.

Flessner's (2012, 1) research focusses on issues surrounding teacher education and aimed at "suggesting ways for teacher educators to reconnect with classroom practice in an effort to

remain relevant in the quickly changing world of P-12 education". Very often, according to Flessner (2012), teacher educators isolate themselves to university classrooms and do not engage on platforms outside of the university setting e.g., with practicing teachers, children or visits to school classrooms. Teacher educators, specifically those responsible for teaching methods courses, "are often accused of being out of touch with classroom practice" (Barnett 2006). Lecturer C (TEI 2) recommended:

> "I think there should be a system where all working at the university, training students to become teachers, should have been teachers themselves, staff should have been teachers ...."

Lecturer B (TEI 1) argued that quality should not be measured on individual lecturers but should be seen within the context of what the institution had to offer. He asked, "to what extent do we have richness of experience that we bring to the classroom to prepare them for teaching and to what extent do we have richness in terms of relationships with learners and students?" He went on to explain that at their institution lecturers taught in different ways and "students are exposed to a rich variety of people, of understanding South Africa, of information and of understandings of teaching that well prepares them for schools".

"Good modelling is an essential component of good teaching" (Aleccia 2011, 89), since pre-service teachers' or students' own experience of learning will have a powerful effect on how they view effective teaching and learning and will invariably influence their own teaching practice. Crandall (2000, 35) states that:

> "... these preconceptions are remarkably resistant to change unless awareness of that prior learning is developed in the teacher education program and opportunities for practical experiences and conscious reflection upon those experiences are provided throughout the program."

Only 34 per cent of the lecturers felt that modelling good teaching was very important in the initial teacher-training programme and that students needed to see in lecturers what an "ideal teacher" should be. Also very significant is that lecturers teaching students should "emulate, though at different levels, how we expect teachers to conduct themselves with their learners in a classroom" Lecturer E (TEI 1). Another lecturer expressed the view that good lecturers should always be mindful of "what they do, how they do it, and how they carry themselves". They should exemplify "the qualities of a professional with high ethical and moral standards". Lecturer C (TEI 1) discussed the challenges lecturers face in the development of teachers:

> "The struggle for me is to get them to make a conceptual link between content and practice because we are looking at content – practice relationship. Unless you can make that link you are wasting

> your time to put it very bluntly. It is not an easy thing for me to do or learners to do. They have to help them make conceptual links with what they are doing in class and the world outside the school. That to me is the great challenge in teacher education."

Lecturer E (TEI 1) felt: "I must give them a model they must emulate when they go out into the school. I think it serves our purpose well because I go in-depth because I teach for understanding." Two other lecturers acknowledged that although they believed they were serving the students' purposes well, there were aspects that needed to be addressed in this regard.

"Teachers of teachers" have the responsibility to construct knowledge with the aim of developing the intellect of pre-service teachers, consequently serving their needs. The focus on aligning the practical with the theory and reflecting on and guiding students through modelling is needed for application during their teaching practice sessions.

Korthagen (2001) wrote an intriguing paper interviewing nine teachers regarding good role modelling by former teachers and their influence on their craft. One of the student's fondly remembers one of her teachers:

> "She was extremely knowledgeable about literature and grammar. She stimulated me to want to know more ... I wanted to read and read and understand .... She was always an English teacher and we all liked it .... She had quite an influence on me .... I definitely will use a lot of different things like she did."

Korthagen (2001) relates that not only did this student recollect the visual image of the teacher but also the emotions that accompanied this experience which included the values, feelings and behaviour connected to the image. Korthagen (2001, 5) reminds us that "feelings, images, role models, values, and so forth, may all play a role in shaping teaching behavior in the here-and-now of classroom experiences, and often unconsciously". The gestalts influencing student teachers' perceptions of and behavior in practice can only become clear to them if there are sufficient practical experiences within the teacher education program.

Connecting theory to practice

Students (F/G 4: TEI 1) report that there is not a clear understanding between instrumental and relational understanding in their course. Lecturers focus on instrumental understanding which focuses on knowledge and application, rather that relational understanding which focuses on why it works and how it connects to other rules. This again highlights the breakdown between theory and practice. Three responses from students from various institutions include:

> "I think the main focus of our degree now is to be able to teach children and that subjects we are taught are based on the curriculum itself and how to teach. ... but it's more theory. It's not really relevant as to how you are going into the class one day to teach ...." (F/G 3: TEI 4).
>
> "Some lecturers know a lot about their subject but they had no idea how to communicate it to an audience. They would rather be academics and researchers because they are terrible to listen to ...." (F/G 2: TEI 1).
>
> "... you come to varsity you already have a sound knowledge if you're specialising in math, so give the same time to methodology, because methodology is the one they should be focusing on, they should focus on the practical part ...." (F/G 1: TEI 3).

On the contrary, students acknowledged that there were lecturers who attempted to connect the theory to practice from whom they benefitted greatly. One student (F/G 2: TEI 1) referred to one such lecturer from whom "we learnt the theory in class and straight away got to the practical in the classroom and experienced how they come together".

Behr and Temmen (2012) in their study of a group of German teacher education students, report that students also complained that their seminars were "useless". "If these seminars are so constructed that students are given no other task than that of sitting around and (perhaps) copying information from the board or the overhead projector, then can we blame students ..." (Behr and Temmen 2012). Allen and Wright (2014) concur that pre-service teachers are frustrated over the coursework and attach very little value to it, both intellectually and practically.

The in-service teachers in this study concurred that universities, in the teacher education programmes, were not adequately linking theory to practice. Teacher 1 purported that:

> "... what happens at tertiary education training and what happens in the classroom, it's theory and it's practice. As I have said – all the theory that I went through and the notes that I sat up taking. I have never opened those files. I didn't need the philosophy of education, maybe I needed a few hours to put things together into perspective .... If I had an interest in it I can go and study it elsewhere, but it does not help me in the classroom. Methodology, subject knowledge, dealing with the curriculum, discipline – huge, that is one of the biggest problems that young teachers have to deal with, particularly at a high school."

Teacher 2 also reported that during her training she found that not enough was done to connect theory to practice and explained that:

> "... my biggest problem is that they may know the theory and many things, e.g., there is a theory that we looked at in great depth .... Lecturers know theory from an academic point of view which they should, but there is not enough practical emphasis on implementation of theory to [the] classroom situation."

Flessner (2012, 11) participated in a self-study exercise which he claims was "a powerful learning experience ... on multiple levels". After experiencing tension between what was being taught at university and what pre-service teachers experienced in the classroom, he opted to return to the school classroom to reconnect with teaching and learning. "I was an instructor at a research university ... however, during the summer recess, I sought employment as an elementary math teacher in a local summer school program" (Flessner 2012, 5). This helped to connect his "teaching in the methods course" at the university with that of "actual classroom practice". Flessner (2012) continues to explain that two major changes came about as a result. Firstly, he made several visits to various schools in that district and secondly, he developed a Website where he posted videos of him teaching in a grade 5 class which students were now allowed access to view the "practice" that he felt was previously missing from his classroom. No longer were his students limited to course readings and discussions only. "Teacher educators need to be cognizant of the need to continually search for opportunities to engage in more than causal interactions with P-12 classroom practice" (Flessner 2012, 6). Kaplan and Owings (2002, 23) agree and believe that "knowing how to teach is as important as knowing what to teach". According to them, the practices and instructional ideas studied, combined with content knowledge, determine the quality of the teaching situation.

CONCLUSION

The pedagogical dilemma currently experienced in teacher education views university-based instruction as theoretical knowledge acquisition and school teaching experience as the practical component. However, this study focusses on the "silent" disconnect between these two components in teacher education programmes.

Teacher education institutions need to create hybrid spaces to accommodate the fusion of theory and practice. This will ensure that in the preparation of pre-service teachers all role players make that paradigm shift from the provision of the traditional university-based theoretical source to a more non-hierarchical interchange between academia and practice. Teaching experience occurs in school classrooms with the host teacher acting as the mentor. In addition, this host teacher still has to carry the full load of classroom teaching and the administration that accompanies it. Their role is to primarily provide a place for pre-service teachers but their role widens since teacher education programmes do not fully provide pre-service teachers with the preparation and support required for these placements. The "disconnect between what students are taught in campus courses and their opportunities for learning to enact these practices in their school placements is often very great" (Zeichner 2010, 483). School teaching experience continues to remain unguided and disconnected from on-

campus courses. Pre-service teachers are left on their own with the assumption that they will cope. Zeichner, (2010, 484) relates the findings of two of the most in-depth studies conducted by Darling-Hammond (2006) and Tatto (1996) to show "that carefully constructed field experiences that are coordinated with campus courses are more influential and effective in supporting student teacher learning than the unguided and disconnected field experiences that have historically been dominant in teacher education".

Teacher educators, especially those teaching Methods courses, remain isolated from the real world of classroom teachers. Pre-service teachers feel that teacher educators are "out of touch" with what happens in classrooms and are not adequately trained to prepare them for the world of teaching. This misalignment between what happens in the Methods course and what students were facing in the school classroom needs to be bridged. It is suggested that teacher educators should become more "engaged in professional development opportunities alongside fellow elementary teachers ... interact with a host of expert practitioners, collect a variety of classroom artifacts, ... all in an effort to improve their instruction in the elementary classroom as well as at the university level" (Flessner 2012, 5). This will set them in good stead to model good practice to all pre-service teachers narrowing the theory-practice divide. Korthagen believes that good practice role modelling is "important to have student teachers examine the values embedded in such role models" consequently, positively influencing their teaching behavior in a more conscious way and bridging the theory-practice gap.

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