

What Shape Teachers' Professional Development?

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Introduction

Teachers' professional development is a complex process that is shaped by a number of factors. Studies of teachers' professional and career development have identified phases, sequences or stages that teachers go through in the course of their careers (see for example Field, 1979; Burden, 1990; Fessler and Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1993a). Typically, beginning teachers go through a "survival" phase where they are pre-occupied with their own survival in the classroom. They feel diffident, inadequate and ill prepared. Some of the well-documented problems and concerns in this phase are those of reconciling educational ideals and realities, maintaining classroom discipline, establishing an appropriate relationship with students, playing the role of a teacher and having an adequate mastery of knowledge as well as instructional methods (see also Fuller and Brown, 1975; Adams, 1982). Huberman (1993a) observes that this phase is also a phase of "discovery" where teachers are excited by the fact that they are now a teacher with their own students. The survival and discovery elements often go together, with one or the other being more dominant. He refers to this phase as "exploration" (p. 5). Positive experience in the first phase usually leads to a phase of

“stabilization” where teachers consolidate their experience from the first phase, gain confidence in teaching and master teaching skills. They are more flexible in their classroom management and better able to handle unpredictable situations. This phase is marked by a move away from concerns about self to concerns about instruction and the impact of their instructions on students. In other words, teachers’ focus changes from self to students (see also Field, 1979; Lightfoot, 1985). Instead of asking questions about how well they are doing, they ask questions about how well the students are doing. Instead of putting the blame on themselves for a lesson that did not go well, they think about what are the possible factors which have contributed to the problematic lesson. It is also in this phase that, typically, teachers become committed to teaching. Negative experience in this phase, however, could lead to a phase of self-doubt.

Following the stabilization phase, Huberman (ibid.) observes that some teachers go through a phase of “experimentation” and “diversification”. In order to make their teaching more effective and more challenging, they begin to experiment with new ideas for teaching, using different instructional materials and method and a variety of classroom management strategies (see Feiman-Nemser, 1983). Sikes, Measor and Woods (1985) point out that teachers going through this phase are highly motivated, enthusiastic, ready to confront issues which they took for granted before and to take on new challenges. This phase corresponds to what some teacher development studies have referred to as a “renewal stage” where teachers look for innovation (Katz,

1972). Yet, as Sikes et al. (1985) observe, the desire to increase one's impact in the classroom often leads to a heightened awareness of problems with the system and the desire to go beyond their own schools to bring about change. For those teachers who get involved energetically in reforms, particularly structural reforms, may become disappointed and frustrated by the lack of impact of their efforts. Their disillusionment could lead to a phase of self-doubt and uncertainty about their commitment to teaching. For other teachers, a phase of self-doubt can be caused by factors like the monotony of classroom teaching and unpleasant working conditions. Huberman (ibid.) refers to this phase as "reassessment".

A phase of uncertainty or even crisis can lead to another phase, or rather a state of mind, where teachers come to terms with themselves and hence have more peace of mind. They are less vulnerable to others' perceptions of them. This is a phase of "serenity" in which teachers speak of "being able to accept myself as I am and not as others would have me be." (Huberman, ibid, p.10). It is marked by a decline in professional investment and enthusiasm on the one hand, but by greater confidence, more tolerance and spontaneity in the classroom on the other. It is also a phase where teachers' relationship with students becomes more distanced, largely caused by the widening gap between themselves and their students (see also Lightfoot, 1985; Prick, 1986).

Some studies observe that a phase of "serenity" is followed by a tendency towards conservatism which is characterized by resistance to and

skepticism about innovation and change, increased complaints about students and colleagues, and a craving for the past (see Prick, 1986). In other cases, conservatism follows a phase of self-doubt and results from reactions against failed attempts at structural reforms (see Huberman, 1993a). Though conservatism is closely related to age in most cases, the Swiss data in Huberman's study show that this is not necessarily the case; the most conservative teachers in his study were actually the youngest teachers.

Studies in human life cycles observe that near the end of a career, people disengage themselves from professional commitments and allow more time for their own personal engagements. Similarly, a phase of "disengagement" has been identified in teachers' career cycles. However, the disengagement can take the form of withdrawing and investing their time and effort elsewhere, as a result of disappointment with the system, or reconciling the discrepancy between what they had set out to achieve and what they have actually achieved. In Huberman's words, the disengagement can be "bitter" or "serene" (1993b, p.110).

The phases of development outlined above, however, are not linear. As Huberman (1993b) points out, attempts to delineate teacher development as a discernible sequence of phases is problematic because they tend to ignore the factors such as personal experiences, social environment as well as organizational influences which shape teachers' development. Indeed, researchers have found that teachers move in and out of the various phases (see for example Fuller, 1969; Sprinthall, Reiman, and Sprinthall, 1996; Field,

1979). For example, Fessler and Christensen (1992) found that involvement in professional development and assuming new roles such as being a mentor teacher could result in teachers moving back into a phase of enthusiasm and commitment. Similarly, new problems could make a teacher lose self-confidence while success could have the reverse effect (see Field, 1979).

The questions that this chapter addresses are: What are the factors that shape teachers' professional development? What might contribute to teachers' moving in and out of a certain phase? Why are some teachers able to maintain their professional growth and become expert teachers whereas other teachers remain very much an experience non-expert? What implications do answers to these questions have for teacher education?

Teachers' Professional Development and Contributing Factors

Studies of teachers' professional growth have identified a number of possible factors and sources of influence that shape teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning, their understanding of their work as a teacher, as well as their developmental path. One often mentioned factor is what Lortie (1975) refers to as an "apprenticeship of observation". Lortie points out that all teachers have had the experience of being taught as a student and that this experience often provides them with an image of what teaching is and, in some cases, what teaching should be like. This source of influence is particularly strong for teachers who join the profession without professional

training and hence have nothing but their past experience to fall back on, even when the experience was unpleasant (see also Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Calderhead and Robson, 1991; Grossman 1990; Johnston 1992; Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1992; Calderhead and Shorrock 1997, Raymond, Butt, & Townsend, 1992). Grossman (1990) points out that a further dimension of influence resulting from an apprenticeship of observation is that teachers' memories of themselves as students often shape their expectations of students as well as their conceptions of how students learn (see also Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann, 1986). For example, teachers often compare what their students are like now with what they themselves were like when they were students and expect the former to behave similarly.

Another factor is the context of work. Studies of the socialization process in teacher development have pointed out there is a complex interaction between the beliefs and values held by individual teachers and those held by the institution (see Calderhead and Shorrock 1997). The latter has a powerful "wash out effect"; they often eradicate what teachers have learnt in their professional training courses (Lacey 1977; Zeichner and Gore 1990; Raymond et al. 1992). In some cases, teachers have to weave their way through the obstacles and barriers of institutionally accepted beliefs, values and practices (see also Johnson 1996). On the other hand, school contexts which are collegial and collaborative can have a very positive effect on teachers' professional development. The relationship between the two is

dialectical. The way the teacher responds to their context of work shapes the context of which they are a part.

A third factor is teachers' own teaching experience. It has been repeatedly pointed out in research on teacher education that teachers consider classroom experience the most important source of knowledge about teaching (see for example, Lanier and Little, 1986; Anning, 1988). Teachers have gained immensely rich practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1983) about teaching through practical classroom teaching. This knowledge, which is often tacit and unarticulated, is a powerful basis on which teachers plan for future action.

The fourth factor is the personal life experience of teachers that shape their 'substantial self' (Nias, 1984), which is the person that they bring into the classroom context. Bullough, Knowles and Crow (1992) believe that beginning teachers often enter pre-service courses with partial but firmly held conceptions of themselves as teachers and a teaching schema which is developed over years of life experience (see also Lyons, 1990). These conceptions not only influence the way they begin to teach, but also act as life-long references for their identity as teachers (see for example Goodson, 1991; Bell and Gilbert, 1994; Raymond, Butt and Townsend, 1992). As Goodson (1991) points out, "Life experiences and background are obviously key ingredients of the person that we are, of our sense of self. To the degree that we invest our 'self' in our teaching, experience and background therefore shape our practice." (p. 144) It is this personal dimension that is being emphasized in Connelly and Clandinin's conception of teacher knowledge as

personal practical knowledge (see Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, 1995). In recent years, a number of studies have been conducted on teachers' lives and biographies and their role in teacher development (see for example the studies collected in Goodson, 1992; see Carter and Doyle, 1996 for a summary of studies in this area).

Finally, the professional training that teachers have had, or have not had, is another powerful factor. Despite the criticisms of teacher education courses as being ineffective, studies of the interrelationship between teacher education courses and teachers' beliefs and classroom practices have shown the former to be an important contributing factor (for criticisms of formal teacher education programs, see Berliner, 2000). For example, Grossman's study (1990) showed that the three teachers with professional preparation shared striking similarities in their conceptions of teaching English, and they attributed their conceptions to the influence of the professional coursework that they attended. By contrast, the other three teachers with no professional preparation differed considerably in their conceptions of teaching English. Similarly, Borg (1998) found that the initial teacher training course had a powerful impact on the personal pedagogical system of an experienced EFL teacher, so much so that even negative classroom experience did not bring about change in his work. Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow (2002) found that teachers who have gone through a single formal teacher education program felt well-prepared in the core tasks of teaching.

To summarize the above discussion, we can say that the factors that shape teachers' personal conceptions of teaching and learning include their personal background and life experiences, their disciplinary training, their teaching and learning experiences, and their professional training, if they have any. These conceptions have a powerful influence on the way teachers make sense of their work (see Calderhead, 1988). They may be changed or modified as teachers gain experience or as they encounter critical incidents that challenge them. They may also be very resistant to change. The interaction between teachers' knowledge, conceptions of teaching and learning, and the world of practice, is an important dimension that should be taken into consideration in understanding teachers' professional development.

In the rest of this chapter, I shall present the findings of a case study of the professional development of an expert ESL teacher, Marina. I shall discuss the phases of professional development that Marina went through, and the factors that shaped her professional development. The implications of the findings for teacher education will be discussed. The case study reported in this chapter is part of four case studies conducted on ESL teachers in Hong Kong to explore the development of expertise in teaching. For the methodology used in the case study reported in this chapter, see Tsui (2003).

Marina

Marina was in her early thirties when the study started and in her eighth year of teaching. She comes from a working class family and studied in a primary school in a working class housing estate. Her academic results were outstanding and she won a government scholarship in the public examination for secondary school entrance. She recalled having had a teacher who was very kind to her and had given her a great deal of additional help. “I had a teacher who was very nice to me. She was not a good teacher; she used mixed code¹, but she helped me. She gave me additional exercises to work on to help me.” Because of her excellent results, she entered one of the most prestigious secondary schools in Hong Kong, St. John’s, where the majority of the students came from middle-class families and the medium of instruction and communication was English, even in school assemblies. The first two years in this school were “very tough” for Marina. She had great difficulties learning through English in the first few months, and her confidence was seriously undermined. To improve her English, she borrowed books from the school library and read voraciously. Reflecting on her secondary schooling, she observed that although it took her only several months to get used to English medium instruction, it took her several years to re-build her self-confidence.

Marina did not have an English environment at home; her parents do not speak English. So in addition to reading voraciously, she tried to maximize opportunities for learning English. She paid attention to the English around her, including the media, posters, labels, signage, and so on. She said,

“To survive in St. John’s, I have to work on my English.” Marina’s struggle for survival at St. John’s had a strong influence on her conception of learning English and the strategies that she developed for teaching English.

After St. John’s, Marina entered The University of Hong Kong and took translation as her major discipline. Teaching had always been her aspiration since she was a child. Her image of a teacher was that her or she should be kind to students and should be a figure of authority. Marina did not go into teaching immediately because she felt that she needed more work experience in other settings. After working in the civil service for a year and in a hospital for another year, she joined St. Peter’s as an English teacher.

In the following sections, I shall present the phases of professional development that Marina went through. We shall see how her life experiences and learning experiences impacted on Marina’s development. We shall also see what other factors have come into play.

Professional Development of Marina

Phase I Learning Teaching

Surviving in the classroom and relating to students. In the first two years of teaching, classroom management and her relationship with students were two recurring concerns for Marina. Like all new teachers, she found it difficult to handle the multiple dimensions of classroom teaching, the large

number of students, and to exercise her judgment on when to be lenient and when to be strict. She simply followed the golden rule of “don't smile till Christmas” (Calderhead, 1984), an advice given by her colleagues. However, this went against her personality and she was caught in a dilemma. After the first year, Marina felt that her classroom management had not improved; there were still disciplinary problems and she was criticized by some of her students as not being fair to all students. She decided that she ought to be “more firm”, “more serious” so that the class would not “get out of control”.

For Marina, being very strict with students was effective in terms of classroom management. Her secondary three (Grade 9) students were very noisy in all classes except hers. The success she had in keeping students under control was a positive reinforcement for her. She said, “May be that's why I continued to be strict because it worked.” On reflection, she felt that she was too strict and unable to see things from the students' perspectives. She cited the following two incidents which she described as “regrettable”.

There was an S3 (Grade 9) student and I taught him English. He copied his homework and I found out. I penalised him by giving him a demerit. He pleaded with me to let him off once and give him an opportunity to rectify his mistake. I refused. Looking back now, I felt I was wrong. If I had given him the opportunity, I might have helped him to mature, to forgive and to see things from other people's perspective. ... There was another case. It was also a male student. His writing was terrible; it was illegible. I made him do it again. But

he was the kind who wouldn't succumb to pressure. He disliked me, and the dislike was there even when I wasn't his teacher any more. I think it affected his attitude towards English as well. These are regrettable things.

The problem of classroom management and handling her relationship with students persisted in her second year of teaching.

Making learning fun and interesting. Contrary to managing students, in teaching methods, Marina was able to see things from her students' perspective even in her first year of teaching. In the first two years, she was engaged in "explorations" of ways to improve her teaching: how to make learning fun and interesting to the students. Going into teaching without professional preparation, Marina relied heavily on the way she was taught, that is, what Lortie (1975) refers to as the "apprenticeship of observation". She said,

I think it has to do with my previous learning experience and the school culture. ... In my secondary school, some of my teachers ... were very lively. In S2 we had public speaking, in S3, we had debates, we had a lot of group discussions. So I thought that learning English didn't mean that the teacher had to do all the talking. Students should be involved.

She also picked up the concept of working on tasks from her former teachers. "I feel that students need to produce things. We must give them the opportunity to work together, to produce."

Another source of influence was her German teacher at the Goethe Institute when she was an undergraduate. She recounted,

I had a very good German teacher. ... His methods were very communicative. There was a lot of talking, pair work, group work, discussion and he was very funny. If students spoke very softly, he would open a (*Chinese*) paper fan, which meant “speak louder”. For teaching intonation, he brought a musical instrument. He had a lot of influence on me. When I started teaching, I borrowed a lot of his methods.

Apart from communicative language teaching, Marina also learnt how to teach grammar systematically from her German teacher. From her own experience of learning German, she is convinced that one can learn another language through that language without using the mother tongue. Therefore, in her classroom, students are not allowed to speak a word of Cantonese.

In addition to relying on her past experiences, Marina paid attention to anything that was related to teaching. She often went to seminars and attended extra-mural courses offered by universities on specific teaching skills like reading, pronunciation and vocabulary. She bought a lot of reference books and resource books on teaching. She felt that “there was a need to do that” because the school culture was very supportive of change and the teachers were keen to try out new ideas in their own teaching. These references and resource books gave her many good ideas for teaching and she was fully

engaged in experimenting with different activities and different ways of designing activities.

The first phase of her development, which consists of the first three years of teaching, was a phase in which Marina experienced difficulties reconciling keeping discipline in class and building a good relationship with the students. At the same time, however, it was a phase in which her experimentation with various ideas in teaching gave her immense satisfaction, especially when she saw students enjoying the lessons and making progress.

Phase II Self-doubt and Re-assessment

Although being very strict with students helped Marina to maintain discipline in class, she was not happy with the effect that this had on her relationship with her students. She said,

Actually, I didn't feel good about being so strict. The students were scared of me. They would listen to you, and would do what you asked them to, but that doesn't mean they were willing to learn. Because they were scared of you, the atmosphere was not very pleasant in class.

At the end of the third year, Marina was frustrated by the fact that despite her efforts, she was still unable to exterminate disciplinary problems; some of her students were still copying each other's homework. She contemplated quitting teaching and pursuing further study in librarianship overseas. Though there were several reasons that made her change her mind, such as her family

circumstance, the most important factor was the support she received from her principal.

My principal (*then vice principal*) has given me a lot of support. That was very important. ... She didn't actually help me directly in handling students, but she cared about me. She knew what happened and she cared.

Apart from the care and concern from the principal, the school culture and the support system for new teachers that the school has established was an important factor. The school has a double form-mistress (i.e., class teacher) system as well as pastoral care for new teachers.

New teachers become form-mistresses from the very beginning. The experienced teacher acts as a helper. ... In addition to the form-mistress system, an experienced teacher is responsible for a new teacher. This is not done explicitly, but there is an understanding of who is look after whom, and sometimes we also arrange for an experienced teacher to sit next to a new teacher.

In her first year of teaching, she teamed up with her principal (who was the vice-principal then) as form-mistresses. She received a great deal of help from her, particularly in settling disputes with students and they became very good friends. The moral support from her colleagues, her principal, and a pleasant working environment helped her to make the decision to stay on. This phase of self-doubt and uncertainty about her commitment to teaching did not last

very long. She told herself, "This is not the end of the world." and she moved on.

Phase III Understanding and Mastering Teaching

Deciding to stay on marked a turning point in Marina's professional development. In describing her own development, Marina repeatedly referred to the fourth year as the turning point when she began to really deal with disciplinary problems and to see things from the students' perspective. It was also in the fourth year that she decided to make teaching her career and therefore she applied to do an in-service professional qualification program, the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PCED) Program, at the university. The PCED program confirmed a lot of her own practices and provided the rationale for them. For example, she had been using communicative activities but she did not understand the rationale behind these activities until she attended the PCED program. She had always felt the need to distinguish between teaching and testing, and the PCED program re-affirmed her belief. The program also introduced aspects of language teaching that she was not aware of, for example, discourse analysis and text analysis and their applications in teaching, the purpose of group work, and so on.

Apart from instructional practices in the classroom, the PCED program also helped her to understand wider educational issues. She mentioned

specifically that the program had helped her to understand why streaming could have a negative effect on students.

Teacher as a gate keeper, schooling and society, streaming are things which I came across in the PCED program. Even before I came on the program, I had been wondering about streaming. Streaming was originally intended to help students but I had been doubtful about its effectiveness; it made students feel that they were no good. It was only after I studied Schooling and Society² that I realized that it had a labeling effect.

The course on psychology of learning helped her to think positively and to see things from students' perspective.

I think positive thinking is important. And that has something to do with the PCED program. It (The course) talked about students' psychology of learning and the factors that contributed to their sense of failure. Then I felt that I needed to see things from students' perspective. You need to empathize. There is a need to think positively.

Positive thinking is something that she often refers to as an important element when she talks about teaching and about her colleagues. What she learnt from the program not only helped her in her relationship with students, but also in coping with stress and depression.

This phase, which consists of the fourth and fifth year of teaching, was a period when Marina, having had three years' of teaching behind her, had

built up a repertoire of instructional practices. She was able to draw on this repertoire for her teaching, thus allowing her time to explore new ideas, to “tinker” with her existing practices (Huberman, 1993b, p.112), and to think about wider educational issues.

Phase IV Taking on a New Role

In the fifth year, when Marina was still doing the second year of the PCEd program, she was appointed Panel Chair of the English Panel (the former is the equivalent of the English Department in schools in the U.K., and the latter is the equivalent of the Head of the English Department). She accepted the appointment on the basis that she had already been an assistant to the English Panel Chair for two years. Her understanding of the responsibilities of a panel chair at the time was to carry out routine duties such as holding meetings, dealing with circulars, checking students' exercise books, examination papers, and paying class visits to new colleagues. Gradually she realized that the role of the panel chair was far more demanding than that. She did not like the job because she found administrative duties very time-consuming and dealing with personnel problems very unpleasant. She felt that her time would be better spent on teaching than on administration.

In the sixth year, she completed her professional training and she was promoted to Senior Graduate Mistress, a rank about her previous grade. She had had one year behind her as English panel chair. She began to move from

just handling “administrative chores” to introducing changes in teaching in small ways. In her capacity as panel chair, she went beyond her own teaching and started to involve the whole English panel to make changes to their teaching. She started small. One initiative was to get teachers to specify teaching objectives in the scheme of work, something she learnt in the PCED program. Another initiative was to introduce the teaching of phonetics in oral English lessons. Phonetics was not widely nor systematically taught in schools at the time. She found that many of the students were tongue-tied in class not because they did not know the words but because they could not pronounce them. She felt that if students learnt phonetic symbols, they would have a self-learning tool and they could figure out the pronunciation of new words by looking up the phonetic transcriptions in the dictionary. In other words, instead of making a host of drastic changes, Marina focused on only changes which were manageable and which were much needed. She is, therefore, not only tinkering with her own teaching but also helping teachers to tinker with their teaching. The process of getting her fellow teachers to introduce phonetics teaching made her realize that as a panel chair, she could do more than merely dealing with administrative chores; she could bring about change not only in her own teaching but also in other teachers'. However, she was not able to theorize her role until she attended a refresher course for panel chairs in the following year.

Phase V Opportunities for Reflection

In the second half of the sixth year, Marina obtained leave for half a year to attend a government-funded refresher course for panel chair. In this course, she was introduced to the concept of the panel chair as “an agent of change” for the first time. She identified with the concept immediately because she had been already playing the role of a change agent, though she was not able to articulate her role as such. An awareness of her role as a change agent helped her to formulate her goals for attending the course, which were as follows: “to streamline the work of the panel so everyone has breathing space to reflect on their teaching”, “to think of a more schematic programme for staff development” and “to explore means to promote independent learning”. She also had the opportunity to read up on references on educational change and teacher development. Among them is Pamela Grossman’s The Making of a Teacher (Grossman, 1990). She also had the opportunity to reflect on her own development. In her reflective journal, she wrote,

This [Pamela Grossman’s book] reminds me of my first few years of teaching. I didn’t do the PCEd until the fourth year of my teaching profession. The reliance on past experiences was predominantly heavy, particularly in the first few months of teaching. Luckily, I came from a background where drama, role-play and discussions were the norm. The greatest influence on my style and approaches of teaching

was the school culture. It was a time when St. Peter's was still having the pilot scheme and everyone was expected to select, adapt and evaluate teaching materials. When I did the PCEd course, I found that the methods recommended were in line with the approaches I adopted. In retrospect, wasn't that staff development? One of the objectives that I set in attending this course was to think of a more systematic program to help staff development. I began to see one way of achieving this goal is to engage my colleagues in school-based materials development.

Marina's reflection on her own professional development helped her to decide on getting teachers involved in school-based materials development as a milieu for professional development. She zeroed in on the teaching and marking of compositions as an area to start. She read up on writing and she sent messages to *TeleNex*, an English teacher support website, to discuss her ideas and to consult teachers in other schools.

Though Marina was absorbing new input like a sponge in the refresher course, she had problems relating theory to practice, especially in the management of a subject panel. She learnt that for teachers to be committed, it was important to give them a "sense of ownership" by letting them take on responsibilities. However, she was not able to resolve the dilemma between delegating responsibilities and over-burdening teachers with responsibilities. She also felt that apart from assigning duties, she needed to give her teachers something more, though she was not clear exactly what that something was.

Spending half a year away from the classroom to attend the refresher course was considered by Marina as essential to her professional development. It gave her the opportunity to read journals, references and resource materials, to think of how she should play the role of a change agent, and most importantly, to reflect on her work in a wider context. It gave her the time and space to read up on education policy issues which took her beyond her school and her classroom. Marina graduated from the refresher course with new insights, but at the same time, with unresolved questions.

Phase VI Re-investing Resources

Seeking more professional input. Attending the refresher course provided Marina with fresh input, particularly on current theories of English language teaching. At the same time, it made her crave for more. A year after she resumed teaching, she enrolled on a part-time master's program on Teaching of English as Foreign Language (TEFL). The program provided the theoretical bases of her work. For example, she was able to evaluate textbooks in a principled manner; she had a better understanding of group work as a means of getting students to engage in the negotiation of meaning; and she was not only able to distinguish between poorly designed and well-designed grammar activities, but also to articulate the reasons.

Doing a masters' program was very tough for Marina though. She often had to stay up till very late to do her assignments and often had only one

or two hours of sleep. Her students knew about this and called her “superwoman”. So did her colleagues. Marina did extremely well on the course, often getting top grades for her assignments. She chose topics that were related to her teaching tasks at school and addressed issues that were pertinent to her context of work. The master’s program was a way of helping her to gain more theoretical input for her work as a teacher, rather than a way of gaining another paper qualification.

Exploring the role of a panel chair. Marina had a different understanding of her role as panel chair after completing the refresher course. She no longer saw herself as merely carrying out administrative chores, but as steering the direction of the panel and helping staff members develop professionally. However, in helping colleagues to develop professionally, Marina was faced with the dilemma of setting targets and goals for them and not over-burdening them. She said, “My colleagues are already exhausted, I just do not have the heart to push anything more down their throats.” She did not have any formal plans for staff development. Her management of the panel was more on “a personal basis”. By this, she meant talking to individual staff members on a personal basis. For those who were teaching the same level as her, she felt that she could do a lot more by sharing materials and discussing their teaching with them.

An important aspect of the work of a panel chair is quality assurance. In her school, one quality assurance mechanism was lesson observations of new staff members. At first, Marina did not think there was much use in

doing this because she would not be able to see what the teacher was really like behind closed doors. Instead of just rejecting the practice, she consulted the History panel chair. He pointed out to her that the lesson observation would enable her to see what a teacher could achieve. After observing some lessons, she encountered the problem of what feedback she should provide to teachers whose lessons did not go well. She believed that teachers knew when their lessons did not go well and that it would be much better for them to see good teaching in action than just to tell them their shortcomings. Therefore, she invited them to observe her teach and she also asked them to observe good models of teaching. Marina's willingness to open her classroom to anybody at any time changed the nature of lesson observation. It was no longer a quality assurance mechanism but an opportunity for learning. It also enhanced the culture of collegiality and collaborative learning.

Another quality assurance measure was the checking of the grading of homework and compositions by the panel chair. At first she focused on whether teachers made any mistakes in marking and whether they were able to pick out students' mistakes. However, as she learnt more about genres and genre structures, she turned her attention to the students' writing – whether the style and genre were appropriate to the writing task. When she spotted problems in students' writing, she would discuss with teachers how they could help the students. In other words, in the process of exploring of her role as panel chair, she re-interpreted it from monitoring to mentoring.

Phase VIII Taking on the Challenge: Adopting the Process Approach to Writing

The six-month refresher course gave Marina time to step back from her teaching and to ask questions about existing practices. In Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1993) words, she "problematized routines" and asked questions about practices that had been taken for granted. In particular, it provided her with the opportunity to seek answers in an area that had troubled her for a long time - the inordinate amount of time spent on grading compositions and the lack of impact that the grading had on students' writing. She said,

...marking compositions is very painful. After all the marking, you find that the students are still the same, the content is very limited and uninteresting. ... These ideas (produced by the students) ought to be very interesting, especially when they are in their teens, and they should be very creative. But why did they have to do it merely as a piece of homework? ... the question is whether we are giving them the opportunity to do so. "Their understanding of composition is that they have produced a piece of writing, the teacher's responsibility is to correct the mistakes, and then their job is to do the corrections and hand it in. But this is not what writing is about."

She read up on the teaching of writing, for example Harris (1994) Introducing Writing, and White and Arndt (1991) Process Writing. She found the ideas useful because they corroborated her own experience in writing. She said,

“even in my own writing, I don’t have just one draft. I think if you want to produce good writing, it is not possible to accomplish it at one go.”

After a year’s incubation, Marina embarked on a major experimentation with the process approach to writing in the eighth year. She started with junior forms. The experimentation took place throughout the whole school year where all staff members teaching S1 to S3 (Grades 7 to 9) were involved, some to a fuller extent than others. (For a detailed account of the implementation, see Chapter 9 in Tsui, 2003.) In a panel meeting in which the teachers reviewed the effectiveness of the implementation (a meeting in which I participated), it was clear that there was marked improvement in students’ writing. The meeting ended with the teachers in high spirits agreeing that the try-out was a success and a move in the right direction.

Looking back at the changes that she introduced, Marina felt that she was lucky to have colleagues who would support her whenever she introduced changes. Marina attributed this to the school culture, which was collegial and supportive of collaborative endeavors to bring about change. Apart from the school culture, she felt that there were other factors as well. She said, “Yes, there are other factors. My colleagues and I have a very good relationship. I try to be supportive and give my colleagues as much help as I can, like sharing good resources and ideas. I also show appreciation for their hard work. I try not to be bossy and I don’t put on airs. My colleagues feel that I’ll stand up for them and fight for them when necessary.”

Marina also tried to be reasonable the demands that she made on the teachers. When she initiated process writing, she was very much aware of the extra work that needed to go into the grading the multiple drafts that students produced. She persuaded the school authority to be flexible about the number of compositions that they required the teachers to give students each school year³. She consciously avoided a top-down approach when introducing innovative practices. She tried them out first and invited colleagues to observe how she implemented them in her own classrooms. There was a great deal of informal sharing of ideas which she felt was very useful in changing beliefs.

Reflecting on her own professional development, Marina saw three broad stages. She said,

The first year is a stage when I was very green. (I) didn't know what was going on. I just observed and followed others. The second to the fourth year, I was already developing my own style of teaching. From the second year onwards, I used a lot more group work in teaching, which was (a) more active (style of teaching). It was a period when I learned how to handle students. The years following up to now (that is, from the fourth year onwards), ... because I am a panel chair and I have to run the (English) panel, I have entered a stage in which I am not just responsible for my own teaching, but I also have to give advice to other colleagues. I think I will divide it (*my professional development*) into these three broad stages. The last stage began in my fifth year (of teaching). I had already established something about

teaching and I just built on that. And the other thing is how to get along with my students. I know how to handle it skillfully and tactfully. My new role in the panel is the thing I need to develop.

Discussion

From the above account of the professional development of Marina, we can see that how the factors and sources of influence outlined at the beginning of this chapter have shaped her path of development. As Huberman (1993a) points out, the phases of professional development that an individual goes through, the ways in which these phases take shape and the sequence in which they occur are very much dependent on the factors which come into play in the individual's professional life. In the case of Marina, it is clear that factors such as personal life experiences, learning experiences, teaching experiences, professional training and the context of work figured prominently in her developmental path.

Marina entered teaching with a personal conception of teaching and learning. Her primary school experience contributed to her image of a teacher: she should have authority and yet should be kind and caring to students. She should also have experience working in settings other than a school. This served as a reference for her as she explored her role as a teacher (see Bullough et al., 1992). The development of her relationship with the students is one where the seemingly conflicting qualities of the teacher as having authority

versus being kind and caring were reconciled. She is no longer a figure of authority that has control over her students. She is seen by students as a friend who they feel free to ask questions and can turn to when they have personal problems. An expression often used by her students to describe her is that she is “totally integrated with the students”, and yet at the same time she is one who they respect and can learn a lot from. Marina has become the “agony aunt” for her students. They wrote her letters to tell her about their misery, their dating problems and which teacher were no good, and so on. Marina said, “I can feel my own development through my relationship with my students.”

Her own learning experiences had a strong influence on her conception of what language learning involved. They were the bases on which she formulated her personal practical theories of teaching. Her experience of going from a working-class housing estate school to a very prestigious middle-class school and having to struggle very hard to survive in the school had a strong influence on her personal beliefs about learning in general and English language learning in particular. Reading and maximizing the available resources for learning English figured importantly in her teaching (for detailed accounts of Marina's teaching, see Chapters 6 and 7 in Tsui, 2003). Moreover, her struggle for survival in school influenced her personal belief in the importance of maximizing time for learning. This was reflected in her insistence on punctuality in attending classes, both for herself and her students, so that full use can be made of the time allocated to one lesson⁴.

The professional input that she obtained from various sources, such as references, the PCEd program and seminars, and the integration of theory and her own learning experiences helped her to understand and to master teaching. The master's program that she was attending when the study was conducted provided the theoretical motivation for her practices and stimulated her to probe deeper into questions relating to students' learning, the curriculum and language policy. While her learning experiences helped her to develop techniques and strategies for learning, the professional and theoretical input that she obtained helped her to theorize her practices.

The school context in which she worked and the way she responded to it played a crucial part in her professional development. On the one hand, she was able to benefit from supportive, caring and collaborative school culture, which helped her to move out of the phase of self-doubt and become a committed teacher. On the other hand, her positive responses were very much part of the school culture which shaped her own professional development as well as that of the teachers on the English panel.

In studying the factors predictive of career satisfaction, Huberman (1993b) found that teachers who engaged in classroom-level experimentation were more likely to be satisfied with their career later on than those who were heavily involved in structural reforms. Furthermore, Huberman found that "recurring episodes in which the demands of the situation are slightly beyond one's existing repertoire" are crucial for professional development. (1993b, p.112). He observed that career satisfaction was high "...when teachers felt

“pushed” or “stretched” beyond their customary activity formats or materials and met this challenge through systematic revisions of their instruction repertoire.” (1993b: 113) Huberman’s observations echo Bereiter and Scardamalia’s (1993) theory of the development of expertise in all professions, including teaching. According to them, experts are those who work at the edge of their competence. It is when they refuse to get into a rut and seek new challenges going beyond the “customary” that their performance becomes exemplary. This view is shared by Ericsson and Smith (1991) who point out that “one should be particularly careful about accepting one’s number of years of experience as an accurate measure of one’s level of expertise.” (p.27). They maintain that the learning mechanisms that mediate the improvements from experience have a crucial role to play in the acquisition of expertise.

Huberman’s observations and Bereiter and Scardamalia’s theory of expertise were borne out in Marina’s case. The professional development of Marina was a process where she was continuously working at the edge of her competence (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993). For example, in handling teacher-student relationship, she was unhappy about merely maintaining control over students; she was not complacent about her class being the best-behaved class in the school. She wanted to develop a relationship with students which was conducive to learning. She also wanted to make learning enjoyable for them. Her ability to “integrate with the students entirely” was the result of Marina’s effort over the years.

In classroom teaching, we can see a persistent search for renewal of teaching in small and big ways. There was constant questioning of what she was doing and how she could make it better, and an awareness of what she needed to know in order to do her job well. Reflecting on her professional development, she felt that she was expanding her repertoire of teaching skills but there were still areas of teaching that she needed to think about more. For example, her speaking lessons were well-received by students but she was not satisfied. She felt that there was a need to re-examine the materials that she developed three years ago and see what needed to be changed. In other words, there was constant experimentation of different ways of helping students to learn and close scrutiny of the learning outcomes. In playing her role as panel chair, Marina rose to the challenge of being an agent of change in her school. Through the process of leading her teachers to implement a new approach to teaching writing, Marina re-conceptualized her role from a care-taker to a mentor (for a detailed account of the her implementation of process writing, see Chapter 9 in Tsui, 2003). It is through the process of constant renewal, meeting and looking for challenges, reflecting and “reframing” (Schon, 1987), that is, coming to a new understanding of her role as a teacher and a panel chair, that Marina became a committed and an expert teacher.

Implications for Teacher Education

In this chapter, I have outlined the phases of professional development of Marina and the factors that shaped the path that she has taken. While the phases that Marina went through bear characteristics that have been identified in the teacher development literature, they varied from those outlined by Huberman in terms of the ways in which the phases took shape as well as in term of the sequence. The non-linear and somewhat idiosyncratic and individual nature of professional development is very much due to the situated and personal nature of professional growth (see also Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002). According to Benner, Tanner, & Chesla (1996), “being situated” means that one is neither totally determined or constrained by the specific context, nor is one radically free to act in whichever way one wants. Rather, there are “situated possibilities” (Benner et al., 1996, p. 352). This means that “there are certain ways of seeing and responding that present themselves to the individual in certain situations, and certain ways of seeing and responding that are not available to that individual.” (ibid.) Therefore, the developmental paths that teachers take depends on the ways in which they personally interact their specific contexts of work, of which they are a part, and the ways in which they see the possibilities that can be opened up for her professional learning. It is essential for teacher educators to recognize the situated and personal nature of teachers’ professional growth and not to constrain teachers’ development by being prescriptive (see also Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002), to understand the “situated possibilities” that are open

up for each individual teacher, and to help them to maximize the opportunities for professional learning.

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Endnotes

¹“Mixed code” refers to using English and Cantonese in teaching, which is a very common practice in many schools in Hong Kong because students’ limited ability in understanding instructions in English. The use of “mixed code” in teaching was very much frowned upon, and the Department of Education (the equivalent of the Ministry of Education elsewhere) has made repeated attempts to stamp it out with little success.

² Schooling and society is a module offered in the educational theory component of the PCEd course.

³ In Hong Kong, the Education Department gives schools a rough guideline of how many compositions they should expect a teacher to give to students. Schools have the flexibility to decide on the number of compositions that they give to students, but they will be asked to justify the number when the Education Department conducts an inspection.

⁴ The duration of a single lesson for her school is thirty-five minutes. This is the norm for most schools in Hong Kong although there is now a tendency to lengthen lessons to 50 – 60 minutes.