Chapter Nine   Teacher stories: teaching to change

This chapter continues the exploration of *empowerment* as an educational principle, and offers a further perspective on the notion that "deep learning leads to change of both the learner and what is learnt". Whilst Chapters Seven and Eight explored this process with reference to students on language and literature programmes, this chapter explores 'transformation' with reference to teachers developing their practice. The chapter returns to the notion suggested in the opening chapter, that "action research is grounded in the story-teller" (McNiff, Whitehead and Laidlaw: 1992: 7) and explores the role of teacher stories in developing both a sense of self and a sense of community.

The chapter draws on two projects developed between 2002 - 2006, both with in-service practising teachers on a Diploma/MA programme in language teacher development at Oxford Brookes University.

- 9.1 describes the evolution of an action research assessment cycle in which teachers set up and evaluate their own process of change.. As with Chapter Eight, it considers the intertwining of assessment, teaching and deep learning.
- 9.2 describes a project in which teachers build a distance learning community through sharing stories and arriving at a shared statement of core values.

9.1 Teaching as learning: action research as a change agent

The questions which structure this section (as with the opening chapter of this thesis) were suggested by Whitehead and McNiff (2006; McNiff and Whitehead 2005).

9.1.1 What is my concern?

In 2001 I became course leader of an in-service teacher development programme. Although the teachers were highly experienced, and worked in a wide range of teaching contexts worldwide, the teaching assignment prescribed at the time paralleled almost exactly initial teacher training schedules, with a top-down approach to evaluation involving detailed checklists of prescribed standards. These were modelled on the Cambridge University DELTA guidelines (Diploma in English Language Teaching to

Adults) - a 'one size fits all' yardstick of excellence that addresses 'ideal scenario' classes. My concern was that this assignment was not finely-tuned to the many contexts in which these teachers worked. Nor was their considerable experience and expertise being recognised, to generate meaningful and relevant criteria of their own. More broadly, I was concerned that what was offered to the teacher were ***criteria*** "in the form of checklists which enumerate competencies, and which can be ticked off" (Whitehead and McNiff 2006: 82) rather than ***standards of judgement***, the opportunity to "root their work in what they hold really important." (ibid).

9.1.2 Why was I concerned?

In addition, I felt the assignment was not congruent with the mission of the programme, to develop reflective and independent teachers in sustainable cycles of self-development. On the contrary, the assignment seemed disconnected with the notion of development, allowing very little scope for the teacher to be independent or to determine their own values. In most cases, criteria was based on externally visible evidence that could be identified within a single lesson: rather than across a sequence of learning and teaching. Discrete classroom skills (such as elicitation and correcting error) were weighted equally, on a lesson by lesson basis, with more fundamental long-term qualities (such as responding to student needs, establishing rapport and creating an effective learning environment). My concern was that 'bad work' was being done, in Kincheloe's sense:

> One of the most important aspects of teacher education might
> involve the study of the processes by which teachers acquire the
> practical knowledge, the artistry that makes them more or less
> effective as professionals. When such inquiry is pushed into a
> critical dimension, teacher educators address the process of how
> professional consciousness is formed, how ideology contributes to
> the teachers' definition of self. Without such inquiry and analysis,
> teachers remain technicians, and teaching remains bad work.
> (Kincheloe 2003: 38)

9.1.3 What experiences can I describe to show why I am concerned?

As specific evidence that the assessment might be generating 'bad work', was the fact that, in the first year of the programme before my arrival, no students had completed the

Diploma. From a cohort of 12 students, only half were active; the others had become demotivated, inactive, were persistently missing assignment deadlines, or were being referred for resubmission.   Some teachers had worked successfully in the classroom for years: successful, in that they felt learner expectations had been understood and met, and that these matched what was understood culturally and within the institution: yet some of these teachers were failing, according to the criteria established as yardsticks.

Other teachers were adopting these paradigms, and as observed from their teaching videos, these were simply not appropriate in their contexts. In this sense, they were meeting everything required of them objectively: and yet, in real terms, this was not meaningful in their own contexts.

Changes needed urgently to be made in order for the programme to be viable, not only financially, but also ethically and pedagogically.

9.1.4 How do I explain what has influenced my educational decisions?

I arrived at an alternative philosophy and practice of assessment, through a series of reasoned and grounded observations:

 -the notion of 'research' in this module needed to be radically revisited, and replaced by an action research cycle in which student/teachers could formulate their own standards of judgement, and develop their own emerging theories. In other words, "it allows people the flexibility to make up their own story as they go along." (McNiff, Whitehead and Laidlaw 1992: 7).

-to 'make up their own story', the assessment needed to embrace fully the nature of reflective practice: the cycles of look/act/think (Stringer 1999) which might emerge in any order and with any number of iterations. Teachers needed to be given permission to learn without limit, both *in* action, and *on* action (Schon 1986), be free to observe their own classrooms both from a reflective distance and from actual engagement, without limit to what is noticed. (Pollard 2002)

-grounded life histories provide examples of experienced teachers' frustration with protocol, audits, prescribed criteria: (Bell 1995; Thomas 1995, Day et al 2007, Munro 1998). Teacher narratives such as Appel (1995) in Germany, Aoki et al (2004) in Japan,

Doecke, Homer and Nixon (2003) in Australia, show the formative and transformational value of teachers exploring their own classroom realities in order to derive living theory which genuinely informs and supports them. Such journeys have found legitimacy in the academy and offer rich insights for other educators: (Cahill 2007, Roche 2007, Delong 2002, Naidoo 2005).

- criteria founded on Westernised assumptions simply do not transfer into other contexts. (Holliday 1994). Strategies such as rote learning, reading aloud, dictation, translation, silence are judged negatively in western paradigms, yet have quite different educational value in other cultures (Cortazzi 2000, 2006; Kirkpatrick 2002, 2007a and b). Establishing personalised, finely-tuned criteria is a starting point for teachers to take ownership of their own improvement, as do Ma Hong and Gong Lixia in Chinese classrooms (McNiff and Whitehead 2005: 77 - 85).

-counselling theory also revealed that our expectations of learner fulfilment are based on westernised assumptions that may not be shared: (Lago and Thompson 1997). For example, the role of male and female fulfilment is very differently circumscribed in a Hindu or Islamic culture, and the price for transgression very high. Nafisi (2004) gives us one example of how differently the genders might experience access to intellectual opportunity, and the social/political responsibilities this places on the teacher.

9.1.5 What did I do about my concerns?

Drawing on the belief that "How do I improve my practice" can only be answered in ways that are culturally, politically and personally meaningful, I evolved the following assessment cycle.

The cycle opens with an intuitive and non-assessed diary entry exploring personal beliefs, in order to offer the teachers a starting point for their reflections. In the course of their development, they revisit these beliefs, deepen them, deconstruct them, recognise where they are and are not behaving in congruence with them

Stage One: Diary notes at the start of term:

Beliefs
Note down four important beliefs you have about teaching. In each case, say why you hold this belief, and note down ways in which you try and act on these beliefs in your classroom.

. **Stage Two: Teaching assignment**

The stage two action research cycle broadly mirrors the four stages of reflection suggested by Kolb (Kolb 1984). The assignment describes a spiralling back to reflective observation, but as suggested above, the cycle might move in any order through any number of iterations of look/act/think processes.

concrete experience: *Teach and record one 'typical' lesson with a class of your choice.*

reflective observation: *View your lesson recording and identify at least 3 areas which you would like to explore, improve or reconsider, as a result of your observation. You may ask a colleague to view the video with you and also make suggestions.*

abstract generalisation: *Select ONE of these areas, and draw up an action plan of how you would like to change or improve. Use the diary notes you made in week one, notes from this module, background reading, observations, and discussions with colleagues, to gather suggestions for improvements.*

active experimentation. *Plan and teach a second lesson in which you try to implement changes and points from your action plan.*

reflective observation: *Write a report/self-reflection, in which you compare your first and your second lesson;   describe and explain your chosen field for change, the ways you worked on this, and how you feel you have changed as a result. You may like to include, also, any further reflections you have about the beliefs you explored in week one.*

 The task descriptors are deliberately broad in order for teachers to tell their own story in relation to each. For example, teachers can interpret as they wish the phrase 'typical lesson' at phase 1. They are given the option of sharing the observation stage with a colleague, and to determine what is meant by an '***area*** you would like to explore'. This could "vary from their own practice, their understanding of that practice, or the situation in which their practice is located" (McNiff et al 1992: 4). The wording does not presuppose any one of these.

This is not to say that their research cycle is unsupported. In the Assignment handbook under Frequently Asked Questions, each of the phases are described and deconstructed, to make them achievable, meaningful, and non-threatening. For example:

How do I know which issue to choose?   Choose something which you can change. For example, you might observe that your students do not like the coursebook you are using. If you ***can*** choose another coursebook, or use different materials, your question might be: how do I and my students respond differently when I use my own/new/different materials in the classroom? If you ***cannot*** change the coursebook, your question might be: how can I make the coursebook more motivating and interesting for my learners?

The importance of realistic targets is advocated by Kemmis and McTaggart (1982), and is a crucial consideration in the question: what can I change - and why should I change it?

9.1.6 What kind of data have I gathered to show the situation as it unfolds?

The data shared in this section includes both teacher and trainer (myself) responses to this newly formulated assignment.

Twenty in-service teachers were registered between 2002 - 2005 for the Diploma in ELT. These twenty included the 12 from the early cohort, absorbed into the new assessment cycle, so it is possible to trace the difference in their progress from the first year to the second. The demography of the group, as represented in the table below, shows the wide range of teacher contexts and cultures, L1 and connection with their learners' L1. What they all have in common, is that they combined part-time study at Oxford Brookes with teaching, at a 100% distance from the host institution. The recordings were posted to me as the assessor, so feedback and all interaction was 'virtual'. In some cases, students were working in pairs on the same diploma study, but mostly they were working individually, supported wherever possible by colleagues in their institutions. This support was encouraged and specifically framed in the task, and the role of peers in the change process became part of the discovery generated by this data.

Category	Data from 20 Diploma teachers 2002 - 2005	Comments
Countries in which teachers live/work	Brazil, Mexico, Argentina Egypt, Turkey, Korea, Japan, Estonia, Poland, Spain, Belgium, Italy, France	Two students working together in Belgium. Two students working together in Japan. Otherwise students are all working individually.
Teaching contexts	- State primary school - After-school private classes: primary level - State secondary school - After-school private classes: secondary level - Adults in private language schools - Adults in in-company classes - One-to-one language tutorials	Class sizes range from 40+ in state secondary schools, to one student in home tutorials.
L1 of teacher /L1 of learners	- English native speakers who have knowledge of the learners' L1 - English native speakers who do not have knowledge of the learners' L1 - Teachers for whom English is an L2, who share an L1 with learners - Teachers for whom English is an L2 who do not share an L1 with learners	Eg. Bilingual English/Italian teacher teaching Italian children Eg. English L1 teachers in Korea, Japan and Turkey Eg. L1 Spanish teacher teaching Mexican Spanish-speaking children Eg. German L1 teacher of English working in an Egyptian language school with Arabic speakers

Table 11: Overview of teachers on the Diploma in ELT programme 2002 - 2005

9.1.7 What are the issues teachers identified as important, and on what basis did they do so?

In viewing their first lessons, teachers identified issues such as the following:

1. *I noticed in the first lesson that I always answer my own questions. I never **give students time to answer.** I'd like to improve the way I ask questions, and respond to answers.*

2. *I was amazed to realise that I only talk to the front row of the class. I completely miss out the quiet ones at the back. Next time, I want to see myself moving all round the class, **addressing and including everyone**.*

3. *I am all the time **insisting on grammatical accuracy** and they keep making the same mistakes. I need to think again about whether this is important and what to do instead.*

4. *I always try to follow my lesson plan even if it isn't working. I thought that's what I was meant to do. Even while I'm doing, I can hear myself thinking, "what shall I do, just **go with what they want or go with what I've planned"?***

5. *My students are not interested in English, I know. **I want to help them see that English can really improve their chances in life.***

Through the reflective process, the beliefs which underpinned these concerns

emerged, either explicitly or implicitly.

Issue 1: Why should I *give students time to answer***?**

In this case, the teacher expressed a core belief that his role as teacher was to 'bring

out the potential' in students. In viewing his lesson, he experienced shock and dis-

ease that his behaviour was not congruent with this.

> It is a puzzle, the conundrum being how the best bring out the potential that the learner undoubtedly possesses. For two and a half years to the present time I have been a student of such a subject.
> (Kieron: Turkish primary school: LI not shared with the students)

Issue 2: Why should I move round the class, *addressing and including everyone***?**

In this case, the teacher identified as a core belief, the importance of sensitivity and

responsiveness to her learners.

> One of my strengths is the good rapport with my students.   I listen to my students' needs and take their questions seriously. I show respect and sensitivity for their traditional, religious and cultural

> background and avoid intimidating situations or the use of
> inappropriate material.
> (Monika: Egyptian adult evening class: L1 not shared with the
> learners)

Observing her own teaching, she became aware she was not always acting on this belief but at times missed out the quieter women at the sides and back of the class, who traditionally deferred to the men before speaking out   To expect them to speak out in a large group may have been culturally unlikely, but moving round the class gave them the possibility of talking to her in a less exposed way.

Issue 3: Why do I keep *insisting on grammatical accuracy*, and what could/should I do instead?

Several teachers made points connected with grammatical accuracy, and their relationship with error. The action research cycle gave them courage to review their practice, explore the reasons for their attachment to accuracy, and the reasons why this wasn't working for their learners. In the process of this reflection, two teachers made radical changes to their practice and to their learners' experience:

> I was teaching the way I had learned to teach. I had taken it upon
> myself to chisel my students' minds with grammar, vocabulary,
> and other information. Now I look forward to the next class,
> where my role is not that of a craftsman but of facilitator. I used
> to repeat patterns to teach them to students in a very controlled
> practice, now I let my students experiment with the language, to
> use it with a purpose. They feel so good with themselves that they
> have establish a rule of the classroom. If we use Spanish we have
> to pay a fine, this goes into the community pot and we will use it
> to throw a party at the end of the school year.
> (Eduardo: Mexican secondary school: shares L1 Spanish with
> learners).

> As a result of my readings and professional studies, I have ceased
> to insist on grammatical accuracy during my lessons. Since
> accuracy is a late acquired skill, it is of little use to blindly insist
> on it during a 30-hour course. As a consequence, I no longer
> correct missing "s". I do not insist on the Present Perfect, although
> I am ready to explain it with examples on request. These include
> asking my students to think about the meaning of: I am married. I
> was married. I have been married. Remarkably, the majority of
> student seems to understand without these explanations.
> (Jacqui: in-company small tutorial groups in France: L1 shared
> with learners)

Issue 4: How can I make a choice between *going with what they want and going with what I planned?*

A number of teachers also chose to focus on their relationship with the lesson plan. The encouragement to reflect 'in action' - mid-session and whilst engaged with the learners, gave them new insights into the value of the pre-planned lesson. One teacher made the decision to plan using much broader categories, and discard the detail she had adopted since her initial training: blackboard plans, sample questions, and expected homework outcomes.

> It is not always possible to plan the individual class in detail because you never know what problems arise, what questions are asked and what topics are developed.
> (Irene: one-to-one business tutorials in Belgium: L1 shared with the learners)

Issue 5: *I want to help them see that English can really improve their chances in life.*

Two teachers in the cohort focused on the lack of motivation of their learners and extrinsic aspects of their experience: the role of English in the community, the socio-economic situation of the learners, and the pressure from parents to succeed in English exams. One teacher chose to stay with the belief that she could change this world for her learners. Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) might have predicted that this teacher would be disappointed in her efforts.

> The subject belongs to a very poor family who cannot even afford the school uniform she has to wear or the photocopies of the English coursebook. English is only present in class; not even in the town or in the nearby cities. Therefore she does not pay attention to English and see the use of the target language rather far from her reality.
> (Liliana: Argentinian primary school: shares L1)

> I would like to tell you that people in this town are very, very poor. Sometimes I see myself as a social worker rather than a teacher of English. Sometimes I pay them their breakfast at the school cafeteria because their parents cannot afford it.   (Liliana: Argentina primary school)

After some struggles, this teacher was unable to find an achievable way in which she could have an impact on her learners in a way that she valued, and she dropped out of the programme.

The second teacher struggled with an achievable response to his concern, but came to the view that

> To lower these filters, **we must incorporate activities that have communications as a goal.**

His action plan included observing his colleagues in search of games, activities, conversations and topics which 'lowered anxieties', and to notice when and where and how the learners seemed to be 'enjoying their studies'.

9.1.8 What insights and implications can be derived from the data?

Insight 1: What did I learn about the assessment process through this data?

The chart below records the ways in which the new assessment impacted on the first cohort of 12. It shows that the process had a tangible impact on progress for 8 out of 12 in the group: 2 borderline students passed and graduated with Diploma (Row 1), 2 students who had not completed earlier assignments, completed this one (Row 2), and 4 middle range students passed the module with distinction (Row 3).

Table 12: The impact of the action research cycle on student progress

Positive impact: numbers	Description of the impact	Comments
2	2 students who had failed or resubmitted earlier assignments: passed the action research module and graduated with a Diploma within a year	One of these students said in his evaluation: I believe that for a considerable amount of time I could describe myself and my teaching as the following: "a case of feeling that everything is fine and you are simply 'coasting' through your work, doing it reasonably successfully, with reasonably happy learners, but you are in a rut of some kind." -----I honestly feel that I have taken the first few steps away from that rut.
2	2 students who had been inactive and missed deadlines on former assignments completed this module. After completion they withdrew from the course. One student failed the module.	Both students reported pressure from work as their reason for dropping out. However, their self-evaluations say that the

		action plan assignment had changed their practice for the better.
4	4 students who had passed former modules with pass grades, completed this assignment with distinction.	
1: no impact	1 student: there were no changes to her grade and she graduated with a pass at Diploma level.	
3: no impact	3 students who had been inactive for long periods dropped out of the programme.	Typical reasons for dropout were: moving to a new job, work pressure, change in life style (new baby).

The students were also required to write self-evaluations of their work on this assessment; all considered that the action research cycle had changed their practice or perception in some way. Whatever their assessed grade along the spectrum from distinction to borderline pass, the recorded lessons each showed palpable change between the first and the second lesson. The freedom to interpret terminology, and select from the range of possible fields of interest, was helpful for the majority of students who were prepared to engage fully in the process. Most, too, connected the cycle of change more and more explicitly with the beliefs they had identified in the opening task. The students who passed in the distinction category, were those who connected tangible change in behaviour, with clarity about their guiding values.

Insight 2: What did I learn about the difference between assessment through 'criteria' and assessment through 'standards of judgement' evolved through lived and embodied values?

What emerged through studying the data, was a huge discrepancy between criteria-based judgments, and the core values which emerged from the teachers, and were the standards by which they wished to be judged. The chart below shares a sample of these differences. The right hand column lists the criteria built into the earlier assessment schedule and derived from Cambridge University DELTA checklists. The left hand column contrasts this with the issues and values that mattered most to the teacher: the values beside which they chose to be judged. The chart reveals that the 'criteria' focuses on the visible and measurable; the teacher values focus on what cannot be perceived in a single 'snapshot' observation; and yet which represent the heart of what teachers considered to be important.

Criteria-related evaluation (Exam Boards)	Evaluation based on embodied values (teachers)
Demonstration of professional standards and knowledge areas such as:	**Sensitivity to issues which are publicly revealed such as:**
• Confidence and clarity in sharing content	Freshness and immediacy of the content areas: (excitement/enthusiasm/freshness)
Overt learner responses	Sense that learners are actually learning, through specific indicators such as:
• Whether learning goals are achievable	• Level of verbal responses
• Whether tasks are achievable	• Laughter and enthusiasm
• What students have learnt at the end of the lesson	• Body language (yawns, slumped in chair, looking out of window)
• Effective materials/well-prepared resources/good use of resources	Creativity/autonomy/ownership of the content and methods
• good planning: well-organised clear objectives	Handling planned actions flexibly in order to be responsive to emerging situations
Teacher qualities	**Sensitivity to issues which are not publicly revealed to the observer such as**
• 'Rapport': good interaction between teachers and learners Revealed through strategies such as using students' names	• teacher's implicit role
	• teacher's prior knowledge of class attitudes and responses
	• teacher's knowledge of information extrinsic to the classroom: eg the role of the L2 politically and socially
	• learner expectations
	• learners' previous and current learning experience
	• cultural attitudes to learning
	• the socio-economic context of the learners
	• sensitivity to the learners' attitude to English
	• sensitivity to the institutional role of English

Table 13: Differences between criteria-related judgements and teacher values

Insight 3: What did I learn about the catalysts for change in a teachers' practice?

The data also revealed turning points which had created change in the teachers' practice and perception. These turning points could be plotted on a spectrum from **discomfort** to **excitement/delight.** Both extremes of the spectrum tended to generate change of some kind; the discomfort for example, of experiencing incongruity between beliefs and behaviour, or the conflict between personal values and institutional ones. At the other extreme, was the excitement/delight of experiencing new ideas, arriving at new insights, seeing self and learners positively change. The teachers' points of change ranged from moments of despair to moments of revelation. The chart summarises teacher voice in response to each catalyst of change.

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Catalyst of change	Examples from the teachers' stories: Why do I need to change?	from DISCOMFORT
Critical incidents	Devastating student feedback: "The feedback absolutely floored me. I had no idea the students felt like that."	
Incongruity with personal beliefs:	"I thought I was a learner-centred teacher until I saw myself teach. I hardly let the students get a word in."	
Unease	"I don't know why things just don't seem to work with this class in the way they do with others" "The subject matter just feels really airy. I don't know what I'm teaching."	
Tiredness	"This is the fifth year I've run this course and I wanted it to feel fresh. I have to keep reminding myself that it is new for the students, so it needs to remain new and fresh for me too."	**to**
Responding to new developments in institutional practice	"I see it like this. Something is happening and I'd rather be part of it than see the boat passing me by."	
Influence of new ideas/approaches/peer support	Conferences, colleagues, students, new resources "in teaching it appears that we often	

Influence of new ideas/approaches/peer support	need others – advisers, observers etc. to help us see the noses upon our faces!"	
New insights	"It was remarkable to realise the students understood without detailed grammatical explanations".	
Experiencing the positive effects of a new approach	"Now I look forward to the next class, where my role is not that of a craftsman but of facilitator."	DELIGHT

Table 14: Catalysts of change and teacher voices

This section recounted a mirrored action research cycle. Whilst the students were following their own cycle of action research, theirs formed part of my overarching research, investigating assessment in teacher education. Whilst their task was to discover personal values and their impact on classroom behaviour, my task was to connect their stories and generate an understanding of their collective experience. Their changed behaviour happened in the classroom between teacher and learner: my changed behaviour happened in terms of the refinement and fuller understanding of how teachers learn best, and how I as teacher educator can frame and evaluate that learning.

9.2 Sharing teacher stories

Section 9.1 looked at individual development in classrooms, and personal processes of transformation. It revealed how personal narratives helped teachers recognise and become more congruent with their own core beliefs. I described above how I was able to generate a collective understanding of the teacher experience, from my vantage point of assessor.

This section focuses on a project between September - December 2006 that sprang out of the first one.   By giving the teachers a similar opportunity to compare narratives, it occurred to me that I was offering them the same rich possibilities of seeing their values and concerns manifested by others in different contexts and settings.

Section 2.1 suggested several reasons why 'connecting stories' are powerful vehicles for understanding of self in connection with others:

- individual stories have political/public implications (Elbaz 1992, Wright Mills C. in Bullough and Pinnegar 2001)
- part of social engagement is to see commonalities in plurality (Lippmann in Magonet 2003)
- personal stories engage with, and reflect, personal values (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001)
- personal values have most strength and validity when revealed in response to others (Buber 1998)

This project was introduced through the medium of WebCT, a shared space exclusive to this teaching community, in which messages could be posted visible to the whole group. The group were twenty two teachers embarked on a teacher development programme leading to either an MA or Diploma. The group were divided into four groups, with five or six in each group. The groups had had time, through other activities, to 'meet' one another, form their own connections, and give themselves a name and group identity.

The project moves, pyramid-like, from diversity of voice, to a 'single point' or consensus. The first stage acknowledges the diversity of the learner community by inviting learners to share stories of 'critical incidents' in their teaching careers.

Share a narrative about a critical incident or key moment in your career as a teacher.

The second stage invited students to read one another's narratives and **identify common ground**; this could involve the recognition of shared experiences, concerns, beliefs, values, approaches, goals.

Review each others' stories and, as a group, identify what you consider to be key themes, issues, shared concerns and questions that emerge.

Critical incidents and teacher stories

The teachers at this stage, shared stories of desperate first lessons conducted before and without the help of training or mentoring: perfectly planned lessons disrupted by monsoon rains hammering on the roof, an observer leaping in and 'giving advice',

carefully sorted handouts flying round the room in the gust of a fan; of battles with unteachable coursebooks or artificial and meaningless tests; of 'students from hell' who were disruptive, sceptical, bullying or dominating; of battles with school authorities for recognition, put-downs from family, bosses, colleagues or students about professional status.

Below are examples of two critical incidents:

1) The devastating impact of one negative student on the class atmosphere

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I asked the students to read through the text silently first
before reading it aloud and discussing unfamiliar vocabulary.
After reading through the text silently, B noticed
that there was an inconsistency in spelling in the text. I
really don't remember what the word was, but I think it was a
word written in BE (British English) in the title and AE
(American English) in the article. I do acknowledge that there
was some kind of inconsistency that should have been corrected
before passing out the text to the students. Nevertheless, B
said he was unhappy about the quality of the material the
school was using. He reprimanded me (and in extrapolation the
school, too) for using a faulty text. I found his tone and
choice of words very rude and unfortunately, I reacted
personally to his attack. I felt personally offended by his
complaint. This caused me to freeze up and become very distant
and formal, not only to Bernd but to the rest of the group as
well.

So the whole relaxed and friendly atmosphere we had had was
gone in an instant and caused by only one student.
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 In-company teaching in Germany

 2. Lesson plan dries up and task loses direction

My relaxed and composed demeanour vanished in a puff of smoke by the time I reached group C. Two minutes into the task and they had already finished what had taken the groups in the previous lesson almost 15 minutes to negotiate. In what B Kumaravadivelu (1997) would describe as "a strategic mismatch" the students had simply used the minimal language that they could in order to complete the task. My instructions to get them to justify their choices seemed to be rather superfluous in some respects. Surely the task could no longer be considered to be authentic if I was now asking them to re-discuss the decisions they had already made?

Secondary School in Tai Wan

Formulating shared values

In the second stage, **identify what you consider to be key themes, issues, shared concerns and questions***,* teachers extrapolated from one another overlaps, connections and resonances: recurring themes with context-specific examples. The postings below reveal these different stages of negotiation, exercises in connection and empathy.

Posting 1 to the group from Parveen

Hello Everyone

Some of the common themes that came out in our group discussion were:
•   Believing in our self: A common theme which has emerged within the group reflective task is to believe in ourselves and to take risks. All of us have mentioned about trying out new things in complicated situations. The situations mentioned are:
Situation: To remove monotony from the classroom.   Action: Involving and encouraging students to do activities.(Haroon)
Situation: To teach English conversation classes. Action: by allowing students to practice English in small groups though the class became noisier but still the result was successful.
(Mark)
Situation: To teach small groups when used to teaching in large classes   Action: by understanding individual differences and demands of individual students.(Parveen)
•   The diverse attitudes of L2 learners to native speakers. It emerges out that there are always more expectations from native speakers.(Mark)
•   The diversity of teaching English in different situations and different countries:
Experiences that were included were from India, Pakistan, Thailand and UK.
(Haroon,Mark and Parveen)

Posting 2 from Steve
1) Search for legitimacy and respect: from students, within the institution, and in the wider community.

2) Search for professional excellence, through syllabus design, quality lessons and appropriate relationships with our students.

3) Teaching as a calling rather than a profession.

4) 'Teaching paradigm's', the theories concerning how to teach effectively and how these affect the way that we teach. What is the nature of the relationship between the paradigm and the practice?

5) The unpredictable affects of culture. It is generally accepted students from different cultures approach language learning from different perspectives. Few individual students are unaffected by the cultural background within which they have developed as a language learner. As a result, we need to treat the different cultural backgrounds within which we work on a case by case basis.

6) Teacher authority and responsibility

For Ed this is a matter a discipline, where to draw the line, how to maintain authority.

For Steven it is the interpretation/intentions dichotomy. If the students are learning in a broadly similar manner than expected then perhaps the class can be described as disciplined.

For Miruna it is evident in her self-motivation and independence) Miruna is motivated as a teacher by her ability to provide the "full service" from syllabus design to the effective delivery of her own material.

Posting 3 from Mark
I have looked through what has been written so far and come up with some possible common themes -

- The important contribution of our own learning experiences to our teaching
- Different attitudes of L2 learners to native speakers
- Different teaching/learning situations exist in different countries/cultures/institutions
- Teachers need to be flexible and take risks to make the most of different/new/difficult teaching situations

We all

- share the difficulty of reconciling previous experience or personal ideology with the realities of a different teaching context.

- search for legitimacy and respect: from students, within the institution, and in the wider community.

- see teaching as a calling rather than a profession.

- desire to be responsible for the teaching experience, in order to be professionally fulfilled: we all need the scope to be creative in order to fully deploy our skills and express our values as professionals

- strive to meet student needs, using whatever resources, teaching paradigms or ideologies work best. Student needs come before any current orthodoxy.

It is clear that the shared values emerged as a powerful political statement about the position of the teacher in general, and the English language teacher in particular. Many felt the English language teacher did, indeed, have particular injustices and pressures to deal with: short contracts, inferior working conditions, disregard by bosses and colleagues. However, in most of the postings, the **delight** of teaching

emerged as a driving force in the teachers' choice of career. This came to be the overarching value behind all the others: we care about what we do and we consider it to be worthwhile.

Please see Appendix Readings 25, 25 and 26 for short articles and poster presentation related to this section.

9.3 Teacher stories as knowledge transformation

This chapter has looked at the relevance of teachers' stories on their development, both personal and collective. We have seen that critical incidents - the moments of discomfort and un-ease, can in fact be turning points in a teachers' learning; and that telling the story of these critical incidents can reveal to the teacher his/her core beliefs. These are the moments when "teaching becomes learning", offering generative principles for change based on deep learning (Sotto 1994). We have also seen how much can be learnt from comparing and sharing these critical incidents: high and low points cut through specificity and reveal experiences which can be universally understood. For these insights to be truly relevant, we have also seen that some kind of change needs to take place - change in perception or behaviour.

The next section, dealing with my move into management within the academy, takes account of these insights. Chapters Ten and Eleven deal with two critical incidents of my own, both catalysts for change and turning points in my own development. Chapter Eleven returns to the insights gathered in this chapter about how teachers learn, and explores how these insights informed me in my new position as Head of Applied Linguistics focused on the professional development of my team.