The Maxims Of Second Language Teaching

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An important issue in our understanding of language teaching is how teachers implement their intentions during the process of teaching. The starting point of a lesson is the teacher's goals and plans. But what knowledge do teachers draw on in planning lessons and what happens between the conception of a lesson and its implementation? This paper seeks to explore these questions by examining teachers' understanding of teaching and the motivations for teachers' decisions and actions during teaching. It seeks to explain the basis for the teachers' interventions in terms of working principles or maxims which teachers consciously or unconsciously refer to as they teach. The nature of these maxims and their effects on language teachers' instructional processes will be explored.

1 Cognitive approaches to the study of teaching

The approach to the analysis of teaching presented here belongs to a tradition which has been termed a 'cognitive approach', to teaching, i.e., one which focuses on mental dimensions of teaching such as teachers' ideas, beliefs, and thought processes. Studies of teachers' theories, philosophies and beliefs have sought "to make explicit and visible the frames of reference through which individual teachers perceive and process information" (Clark and Peterson, 1986). The data for this way of studying teaching is generally teachers' verbal accounts of the thinking they employ at different stages in teaching, such as prior, during, and after teaching a lesson. One of the assumptions of a cognitive approach to teaching is that the primary data for a theory of teaching is the thinking processes employed by teachers themselves, including such processes as planning, decision-making, problem solving, reflecting, evaluating, monitoring, and improvising. These processes may be explored through stimulated recall, think-aloud procedures, narratives, and through analysis of the discourse teachers use to talk about teaching.

A second assumption that has informed much of the research into teacher thinking is a view of teaching as both a "reflective, thinking activity" as well as a "professional activity" (Calderhead, 1987). Calderhead points out that these metaphors emphasize that "teachers possess a body of specialized knowledge acquired through training and experience"; that like other forms of professional activity, teaching shares "its goal orientation in relation to its clients"; and that thirdly, as with other professions, "the problems professionals deal with are often complex and ambiguous, and professionals must use their expert knowledge to analyze and interpret them, making judgements and decisions as they formulate a course of action intended to benefit their client". In this paper one aspect of teacher knowledge and thinking will be explored - the principles or maxims which teachers develop in the course of their training and professional experience - and the ways in which these shape teachers' interpretation and management of teaching.

2 Two Dimensions of Teacher Knowledge

Teachers employ different types of conceptual organization and meaning when they teach. One level of meaning relates to subject matter knowledge and how teachers conceptualize curricular and content aspects of teaching (Shulman 1987). Woods (1995) focuses on these dimensions of teaching, and describes lessons as made up of "conceptual units or elements at different levels of abstraction". He distinguishes between "overall conceptual goals" - the overall purpose teachers identify for a course; "global conceptual
of units" - the individual subcomponents of the curriculum (e.g. the grammar, reading, writing and listening components of an integrated skills course); "intermediate conceptual units" - "activities or clusters of activities framed in terms of accomplishing one of the higher level conceptual goals"; "local conceptual units" - the specific things teachers do to achieve particular instructional effects. Other constructs which have been proposed to account for how teachers realize the curricular agendas they set for lessons and the kinds of cognitive processes they employ, include "lesson formats" (Wong-Fillmore 1985), "task", (Doyle 1983), "script", and "routine" (Shavelson and Stern 1981). A primary focus of this research has been how teachers approach the subject matter of teaching and how they transform subject matter into learning. Much of this research has drawn on a framework of cognitive psychology and has provided evidence of the kinds of pedagogical content knowledge, reasoning and problem solving teachers make use of as they teach (Clift, 1991).

In addition to the curricular goals and content teachers plan lessons around, teachers have other more personal views of teaching. Zeichner, Tabachnick and Densmore (1987) try to capture this with the notion of 'perspective', which they define as the way in which teachers understand, interpret and define their environment and use such interpretation to guide their actions. They followed teachers through their year-long professional training and their first year of teaching and found that teachers' personal perspectives served as powerful influences on how they taught. Similarly in a study of what teachers perceive to be good classes, Senior reports:

Experienced teachers of English perceive that it is important to develop a positive, mutually supportive group atmosphere in their language classes (having apparently made the tacit assumption that language learning is more likely to occur in such an environment). These experienced teachers appear to employ a range of strategies aimed at developing and maintaining a spirit of cohesion within their class groups - sometimes consciously and sometimes subconsciously.

Rose Senior, personal Communication

In describing the basis for teachers' conceptualizations of good teaching, Clandinin introduces the concept of "image", which she describes as "a central construct for understanding teachers' knowledge". An image is a metaphor such as "the classroom as home", "setting up a relationship with children", "meeting the needs of students", which teachers have in mind when they teach. Johnston (1992) suggests that images are a means of representing how individual teachers view themselves in their teaching contexts and how this influences the way they teach. Images are not usually consciously articulated without some assistance, but rather they form the subconscious assumptions on which practice is based.

Johnston 1992, 125

Halkes and Deijkers (1984) refer to "teachers' teaching criteria", which are defined as "personal subjective values a person tries to pursue or keep constant while teaching". Teachers hold personal views of themselves, their learners, their goals, and their role in the classroom, and presumably try to reflect these in their teaching. The term "teachers' practical knowledge" has also been used to refer to the knowledge teachers use during teaching and
emphasises "the complexities of interactive teaching and thinking-in-action". This has been referred to by researchers in many different ways, but as Johnston points out:

All acknowledge that this type of knowledge is built from personal and professional experience, is not readily articulated by the teacher, and is used in complex ways during the process of planning for and executing teaching activities, as well as in making sense of decisions already made.

Johnston 1992, 125

Nearly twenty years ago, Conners (1978) and Marland (1977) examined the principles that teachers use to guide and interpret their teaching. Marland referred to "principles of practice" and identified five such working principles which were derived from stimulated recall interviews with teachers. For example "the principle of progressive checking" involved:

periodically checking progress, identification of problems, and providing encouragement for low-ability-group students during seatwork. In addition to the direct assistance provided during this checking, the teacher who utilizes this principle also reasoned that she was providing stimulus variation for students with short attention spans.

Clark and Peterson, 1986: 289

Connors extended Marland's work with a study of elementary teachers using stimulated recall protocols and found that all nine teachers in her study "used three overarching principles of practice to guide and explain their interactive teaching behavior: suppressing emotions, teacher authenticity, and self monitoring". For example "the principle of teacher authenticity" involved:

teacher presentation of self in such a way that good personal relationships with students and a socially constructive classroom atmosphere would result. This principle was expressed as a desire to behave in ways that were open, sincere, honest, and fallible.

Clark and Peterson 1986: 290

Wilson, Shulman and Richert (1987) emphasize that the two approaches to teacher knowledge described above, one focusing on subject matter knowledge and curricular issues and the other on personal or practical knowledge, should be viewed as complementary rather than alternative conceptions of teacher knowledge.

Recently researchers have become interested in several aspects of teacher knowledge. Some have looked primarily at 'practical' or commonsense knowledge ...
emphasizing the practical, and to some extent, idiosyncratic knowledge that teachers use, these researchers have presented a truncated conceptualization of teacher knowledge. Teachers have theoretical, as well as practical, knowledge of the subject matter that informs and is informed by their teaching: any portrait of teacher knowledge should include both aspects.

1987, 108

Both curricular or subject matter knowledge and personal or practical knowledge provide sources for the interactive decisions teachers make while they teach.

When teaching is viewed as a decision-making process, the teacher is seen as an active agent who selects a teaching skill or strategy in order to help students reach a goal. The choice may be based on one or more factors. If all the types of information mentioned above were used, teachers would need to integrate the large amount of information about students from a variety of sources and somehow combine this information with their own beliefs and purposes, the nature of the instructional task, the constraints of the situation, and so on in order to select an appropriate instructional strategy. (1979:138-139)

Broko, Cone, Russan and Shavelson 1979, 138-139

In summary then, teachers possess two different kinds of knowledge. One relates to subject matter and curricular issues and how the content of a lesson can be presented in an effective and coherent way. This is the aspect of teaching that has to do with lesson plans and goals, activities, materials, tasks, and teaching techniques. The other kind of knowledge relates to the teacher's personal and subjective philosophy of teaching and the teacher's view of what constitutes good teaching. I now want to explore how these sources of knowledge form the basis for teachers' practical actions.

3 Teachers' accounts of what they set out to achieve in lessons

When teachers talk about their teaching, they generally present a rational view of the kind of learning environment they try to create in their classes. They describe their approach to lessons in terms of beliefs or principles which they try to put into practice in their teaching. Shavelson (1983, 386) points out:

Teachers are rational professionals, who like other professionals such as physicians, make judgements and carry out decisions in an uncertain, complex environment...

Thus, teachers behave rationally with respect to the simplified models of reality that they construct. The conception of teachers as rational within the constraints of their information processing capabilities lends to a modification of the first assumption: teachers behave reasonably in making judgements and decisions.

This view of teaching suggests that teachers who are engaged in 'quality-teaching', distinguish themselves from other teachers by bringing to their teaching a personal philosophy of what constitutes good teaching. They seek to create lessons which are effective according to their own subjective criteria of success. These criteria are based on
experience, belief, and values and represent a rational interpretation of what the success of
good teaching depends on. As Connelly and Clandin (1986) observe:

Much of what happens in classrooms is best thought of in terms of practical rules and
practical principles; personal philosophy, routines; ritual, habits, cycles, and rhythms;
and images.

The following examples illustrate three different teachers' accounts of the rational and
reasonable principles they try to build into their lessons.

Sally is teaching business English, and describes her approach to her teaching in this
way:

I know it's a business lesson but I really like to activate their knowledge. My beliefs
are very much humanitarian in that they will learn if they feel a warm cooperative
atmosphere in the classroom, so I'm very concerned that they build up a trust
amongst themselves, and with me, so I like them to do activities that are more
student-centered rather than relying on the teacher all the time. I'd like to be more a
guide, a motivator rather than the one-and-all person who knows it all. A lot of
students here are reluctant to accept that. They are reluctant to take on that
responsibility. So sometimes it's like teaching them how to learn, and I find it a bit
frustrating sometimes. I feel that perhaps they come in with expectations which
aren't met. Some students receive those ideas very well and other students have
barriers. So that's me as a teacher, and I like to vary things very much especially in
three hours and twenty minutes. It's just very tiring. So I love to have variety of
activities and that you could only do standing on your feet, in a way.

Here Sally articulates a student-based approach to teaching that is dependent on establishing
trust between the students and the teacher. Her philosophy goes far beyond simple questions
of methodology and defines her role as a facilitator rather than a 'knower'.

Carol is teaching a beginners' class and expresses her approach in the following
terms:

I think it's important to be positive as a personality. I think the teacher has to be a
positive person. I think you have to show a tremendous amount of patience. And I
think that if you have a good attitude you can project this to the students and
hopefully establish a relaxed atmosphere in your classroom so that they will not
dread to come to class but have a good class. I feel that it's important to have a
lesson plan. Even though I did teach many years ago, at this stage coming back into
the classroom, I think it's important to have a lesson plan of some sort. Because you
need to know what you want to teach and how you are going to go from the
beginning to the end. And also taking into consideration the students where their
ability is, what their background is. I have been in situations where I did not
understand what was being taught or what was being said, and how frustrating it is
and so when I try to approach it I say: how can I make it the easiest way for them to
understand what they need to learn.

Carol's philosophy emphasizes the teacher's attitude and the need to create a supportive
environment for learning in the classroom. She emphasises the need for lesson planning but
her justification for lesson plans is based on helping the students rather than helping the
teacher.

Anne is also teaching a beginners' class, and describes her approach to her teaching
like this.
Particularly with these secondary students, I tend to take a view that they get a lot of grammar at school. They get a lot of fairly heavy input at school. So what I teach to students I try to make sure that they are putting things into the lesson, not me. So I want them to show me what they know. So it's kind of, it's more a process of getting things out of them rather than putting things in whereas with adult students it's more the other way around really. And I want to have fun.

Anne sees her role not as an implanter of knowledge, but as an elicitor of things students have been taught elsewhere but have not had an opportunity to express.

The principles that these teachers describe to account for how they approach their teaching reflect their individual belief systems.

Teachers' belief systems are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and process of teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it. These beliefs and values serve as the background to much of the teachers' decision making and action, and hence constitute what has been termed the "culture of teaching."

Richards and Lockhart 1994 p.30

Teachers' belief systems are stable sources of reference for teachers, are built up gradually over time, and relate to such dimensions of teaching as the teachers' theory of language, the nature of language teaching, the role of the teacher, effective teaching practices, and teacher-student relations.

But how do teachers' belief systems influence their classroom practices? They do so by providing the basis for rational principles which serve as a source of how teachers interpret their responsibilities and implement their plans, and which motivate teachers' interactive decisions during a lesson. These principles function like rules for best behaviour in that they guide the teacher's selection of choices from among a range of alternatives. They hence function as maxims which guide the teacher's actions. These maxims are reflected both in how teachers conduct their teaching as well as in the language they use to talk about it.

4 Maxims
The Cobuild English Language Dictionary defines a maxim as: A rule for good or sensible behavior, especially one which is in the form of a proverb or short saying.

The philosopher Grice (1967) used the concept of maxims to describe the rules which underlie conversation. He described maxims as injunctions to speakers as to how they should participate in conversational interactions. He identified four maxims which underline how participants in conversation co-operate in the creation of coherent conversational interaction:

1 Maxim of Quantity. Make your contribution as informative as is required, but not more informative than is required.
Maxim of Quality. Try to make your contribution one that is true. That is, do not say anything you believe to be false or lack adequate evidence for.

Maxim of Relation. Make your contribution relevant to the aims of the ongoing conversation.

Maxim of Manner. Be clear. Try to avoid obscurity, ambiguity, wordiness, and disorderliness in your age of language.

Clark and Clark 1977, 122

Violation of the third maxim is seen in the familiar school child's joke:

A boy is standing on the street, with a large dog beside him. A man approaches him and asks, "Excuse me sir, does your dog bite." "No." replies the boy. The man then pats the dog on the head and is promptly bitten by the dog. "But I thought you said your dog doesn't bite." The man said angrily. "It doesn't," said the boy. "This isn't my dog."

Grice suggested that in conversation, speakers acknowledge such maxims and violate them only on special occasions or to achieve special effects, such as irony or the creation of rhetorical effects.

The concept of conversational maxims has been found useful in clarifying a universal rule system governing face-to-face interaction, that is, in explaining the principles which govern much of everyday conversational interaction. Scollon (1993) has recently extended them to the study of professional communication, and posited a related set of maxims underlying business telephone calls, the Maxims of Stance.

I would like to further extend the concept of maxims to describe the principles teachers use to guide them through lessons and which they refer to in monitoring and, when necessary, redirecting their teaching. Since these principles serve as rules teachers follow to achieve desired goals for their teaching they can be described as the maxims of teaching.

5 Teaching Maxims

Example 1

To illustrate the role of maxims in teaching I will now examine data taken from lesson transcripts and from case study accounts of teaching, in order to show how teachers either consciously or unconsciously refer to maxims in trying to create effective lessons. The following data is taken from an elementary school teacher's narrative about a lesson.

Most of the teaching has to be very planned, sometimes things might crop up. Well, you know we're doing this book about your school, well, it was somebody's birthday in the unit (for partially hearing children). So I decided, 'Right, how old are you?' So I taught them to lip read the question, 'How old are you?' And they've learnt to write 'I'm 5', 'I'm 6', I'm 7'.
And then cropped up, something I hadn't planned for but which cropped up because one of the children in the unit, she was 8. She's in the other class. And I just jumped on it. So whatever else I had planned for the day I just didn't do because something else had come up that was much more exciting. I mean, it may not sound exciting to you, but for me ... we have to make things exciting, we have to grasp anything we can use.

Well, basically my teaching is planned because I've got to have a scheme of work in my mind, but I do play it by ear to a certain you've got to, if you've got something of interest you'll get far more than from the children using it there and then.

Cortazzi 1991, 68-69

In this extract the teacher explains how she abandoned what she had planned for a lesson and improvised a lesson around her pupils' ages, based on the children's response to something that occurred in the book they were reading. The teacher made an interactive decision because "something else had come up that was much more exciting .. ". The teacher rationalizes this as: "We have to make things exciting, we have to grasp anything we can use". This teacher is responding to an implicit maxim which can be stated as:

**The Maxim of Involvement: follow the learners' interests to maintain student involvement.**

When faced with a choice between following her lesson plan and doing something more exciting, the teacher opts for the second option because it will be more engaging for her learners.

This maxim is also seen in action in the following example, where a teacher describes how an image of "being free to go with what the children want to do", informs her teaching [I = investigator  T = Teacher].

I ... that's kind of the approach you take to what it is you're doing in, in the classroom and I guess there were a lot of things I wanted to ask you that day around that but there were 25 kinds here and it wasn't very quiet and ... do you want to talk some more about that kind of situation. I think that was the situation ... somebody wasn't here to read the books as I recall and you said this is what I usually do but they're in to something else so we'll just let them go ...

T Uhhuh ... they were in to private reading.

I That's right.

T They wanted to read. They were looking at their own books, right?

I Yes and you made the comment about that. Is that something that you do a lot in terms of ... what it is you're going to do with the kids or ...

T Umm.

I How does that develop?
It's teacher, you know, you see my schedule up there, now falling down ... But, so its pretty well teacher-planned, but if something comes up that's unusually interesting, you know, that I don't have down in my book or in my head to do but the children seem keen on it I will follow what the children's interests are. And put my plan away for another day or later on in the day. But with that, from library usually I do give them a quiet time if we don't have a reader of the day or if the children aren't prepared or if ... cause you know their interest is sparked then just after library they're really keen to look at their books and they automatically open them up ... And again through experience I find its much easier, of course, to swim with the tide than against it and I'm very, very happy because that's what reading is about, that they gain a love of books, it doesn't have to say textbook on it ... To be, you know, kosher for them to look at, that's the whole idea that they gain a joy of reading and to ... carry that with them.

Clandinin, 1986, 85

In both these examples the teachers evaluate their lessons to see how well they are following their idea of what a good lesson should be like. When there is a discrepancy between intentions and reality they redirect the lesson to make it conform more closely to the maxim of involvement.

Example 2

An example of a teacher using a related maxim is given in Woods (1995), which describes a case study of two teachers teaching a university ESL course. One of the teachers reported that the primary belief which influenced his approach to the course centered on the importance of student involvement in the content of the course and the notion of student responsibility. The teacher believed in a learner-centered rather than teacher-centered classroom. The maxim which most influenced his instructional decisions can be expressed as:

The Maxim of Relevance: make the lesson relevant to students' needs.

In discussing the teacher's approach to his teaching Woods provides evidence of how this maxim influences the teacher's decision-making:

For this teacher, moment-to-moment decisions in the lesson were influenced by the students. In the videotaped lesson, there were many points at which his decisions were affected by a consideration of the learners which overrode the curriculum and his lesson plan. One activity in the lesson had two planned components; but the second one was abandoned when it became clear that the lesson had evolved in a different direction led by the interests of the learners. He made particular decisions on the spot on how to group the students for an activity in order to avoid certain personality clashes, and then he joined the groups in a certain order and dealt with the students in specific ways, decisions which were later elaborated on while watching the videotape in terms of his past experiences with these students, in terms of their personalities and working habits, and in terms of the preparation they had done for the activity. All of these factors influenced who he sat down with and what issues he broached.
Even at the most local level of his classroom decision-making, his style of speech with the students reflected an attitude of working things out with the students as the lesson proceeded. For example, when a learner brought up a point that he had not planned, he said "OK", I agree with you there". When he discussed his planning in the interviews as well, the content of his discourse as well as the style revealed a readiness to go wherever the students took him.

Woods 1995, 195

Example 3

In contrast to the teacher described in example 2 above, another teacher in Woods' study operated from a very different philosophy of teaching. For this teacher, the pre-planned curriculum provided the primary reference point in her teaching. Her concern throughout her teaching was to cover the material prescribed in the curriculum and consequently to ensure that material she had planned to teach, got taught. A maxim she operates from is:

The Maxim of Order: follow the lesson plan

Wood gives an example of how this maxim influences the teachers' decision-making during a lesson. The teacher is presenting a lesson on definitions and has a carefully planned outline she is following for the lesson. During the lesson a student volunteers an alternative interpretation of a definition pattern she is presenting. But the teacher downplays the student's comments to enable her to keep to her plan. She later comments:

... after I did it [elicited the students' opinions] I was glad that I did it because I thought it worked out well ... and the information they provided me with helped lead me to where I wanted to go, although I had to kind of fill out what they said because they were on the right track but they weren't exactly giving me what was necessary. In the afternoon class I did the same thing ... and that time it didn't work as well because the students didn't give me the kind of information I was looking for.  
Woods 1995, p.193

Woods comments that for this teacher, the preplanned curriculum was central in her thinking. She involved the students only to the extent of helping her implement her pre-planned lesson, but was not prepared to depart from it in response to student feedback. Woods' comments of this teacher:

At various points in the course when there was a conflict between sticking with her planned curricular activity and following another direction initiated by the students, she made the decision to carry out the planned activity.

Example 4

The next example of a maxim in use is extracted from a case study account of how a teacher deals with the problem of managing large classes. The teacher is teaching a class of 50 to 60 students and is required to take attendance. To take roll in the normal manner would take too much class time, so the teacher devises an alternative strategy which involves
dividing the class into groups, and having each group monitor their own attendance and work record. Each group maintains a file, and the instructor returns assignments to the group's file.

As student came into class, the file managers picked up their files. Each group gathered around their file, recording attendance and checking off work completed, getting their own papers from the file and looking at comments. Before leaving class, they put newly completed work into the file. Students to whom I'd written individual notes responded either in writing or in person after class. I found there was an increase in the amount of individual consultation. I could plan it in the quiet of my prep time as I went over records and work rather than trying to remember to "catch" certain students in class with all the other things going on.

I found that this approach to management procedures consumed less class time, was more thorough and resulted in more frequent communication with individual students. Because students saw that I was doing my job by closely following their individual progress, they were encouraged to be conscientious in their work.

Case study, Nancy Mutoh

The maxim the teacher is following here can be expressed as:

**The Maximum of Efficiency: make the most efficient use of class time.**

According to this teacher, a good lesson is one where maximum opportunities are created for student learning. The teacher consciously seeks ways to minimize the time wasted on non-instructional matters.

**Example 5**

Johnston (1992) gives several accounts of how teachers' individual images of teaching shaped their approach to teaching. Several of these images can also be interpreted in terms of maxims. For example one of the teachers Johnston describes expresses the view that a fundamental principle permeating all of her teaching is "giving control to the children". She emphasizes that she sees her role as organizing the class in such a way that the children can pursue their own agenda and are not forced to learn in particular ways at particular times. She follows what might be called the maxim of empowerment.

**The Maxim of Empowerment: Give the Learners Control**

This is seen in these extracts of conversations with the teacher.

"I'm basically there to help the children - to help them learn and to help them to feel comfortable in their learning. So that they are in control.

"Empower - I think is the word of the moment - but I really believe that it is important, so children feel they are in control of their own learning."

"I believe that independence and individuality are very important, so I try to encourage that. Which means not a lot of whole-class instruction - more activity-based."
"I hope to empower the children. What I mean by that is that I'm not the central focus of the classroom."

"There would be quite a lot of choice. I'm aiming for a whole lot of choices in the curriculum I operate."

"So that the day would be "not structured" is probably the best way to put it. I would have some kind of timetable with free time."

"Setting up learning centres and offering the children choices where they can work in periods of time."

"I believe that by offering choice they begin to be empowered, they begin to get power over their own learning ... Because I'm not always there as the one saying, 'It's time to do this: it's time to do something else.' And empowerment in that sense also means not saying, 'We'll all shut up our books now and finish Maths. Now we're going on to something else'. It means they progress at their own pace."

Johnston, 1992, p.130

Example 6
Since the goal of teaching English is correct mastery of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary etc, it is not surprising that attention to these aspects of student performance occupies a considerable portion of teachers' thinking and intervention during instruction. In a study of EFL teachers' interactive decisions, Noake found student errors to account for 36% of the interventions made by teachers in his study.

For example, the following sequence from Noake's (1994) shows a teacher attempting to elicit correct pronunciation of /w/ in the word work.

S I vork in Causeway Bay.
T I work. work.
S I vork in Causeway Bay.
T Say again.
S Causeway Bay.
T The whole thing.
S I vork in Causeway Bay.
T Work. Work. I work in Causeway Bay.
S I york in Causeway Bay.
T Listen. I work in Causeway Bay.
S I vork in Causeway Bay.
T I work in Causeway Bay.
S Vorking? I working in Causeway Bay.

Noakes 1994 p.95

The teacher comments:
I'm trying to correct her pronunciation. She suddenly came out with working instead of work. I thought maybe I should have told her what was correct. So that she's correcting her pronunciation and not individual words and that.

The following extract shows a teacher similarly monitoring for accuracy and intervening to obtain accurate output.

T When did you start? [nominates by gesture]
S4 I start in Excess since the eleventh of January.
T When did you arrive? You arrived on the eleventh of January, did you? You must have started the next day, did you?
S2 The eleventh of January
S5 No, I we start at thirteenth
T On the thirteenth of January. When did you start at Essex? [nominates by gesture]
S1 I start at Essex on the thirteenth of January.
T On the thirteenth of January.
S1 Yes
T Again.
S1 I start at Essex on the thirteenth of January.
T Eulyces [pause] I started
S2 I stotted
T Started
S1 Start
S2 I ... ( ) [aside to S1 in Spanish] I start on Essess eh fourteen of January
T I
S2 Fourteenth January.
T I started at Essex on the thirteenth of January. All right Eulyces: on the thirteenth of January ...
S2 On the th-
T Thirteenth
S2 On the fourteenth of January
T Of January
S2 of January
T Of the thirteenth of January
S2 On fourteenth of January
T All together ... on the thirteenth
SSS On the thirteenth of January
T All right. I started at Essex [gestures for choral response]
SSS I started at Essex on the thirteenth of January.
T Good. Good. Were you at university before?

Allwright 1975, 108-9

These teachers are following the following maxim:
The Maxim of Accuracy: work for accurate student output.

Example 7
A maxim we see teachers in many classrooms responding to is:

The Maxim of Conformity: make sure your teaching follows the prescribed method.

Noakes (1994), for example, observes from his study of the interactive decisions of preservice teachers, that they regularly questioned the appropriateness of their teaching strategies and frequently referred to the instructional principles presented by the teacher training programme.

They appeared to judge their own effectiveness in two ways. Firstly in relation to student responses ... [and] secondly, the extent to which their own actions implemented presented pedagogic principles.

Noakes, 1994, 136

Nunan (1992) in another study of teacher decision-making describes a case study of a teacher who "had articulated a strong adherence to principles and practice of communicative teaching". He comments:

Most of the interactive decisions made by the teacher reflected her personal philosophy of language learning and teaching. She is committed to a 'communicative' orientation with an interactive focus, and this is reflected in the major modifications which she made to the original lesson suggestions made by the authors, as well as a number of the interactive decisions made in the course of the lesson.

Nunan 1992, 154

6 The Nature of Maxims in Teaching
The examples discussed above hopefully serve to support the thesis of this paper, namely, that teachers possess rational orientations towards teaching as well as personal beliefs about what constitutes good teaching and these lead them to try to create specific conditions in their classrooms. The conditions they try to create as they teach reflect the teacher's view of the role of the teacher and of the learners, their beliefs about the kind of classroom climate they think best supports learning, what they believe constitutes good methodology, and the quality of classroom interaction and language use they seek to achieve. The concept of maxims describes working principles teachers operate from which reflect their personal and individual understanding of the 'best' or 'right' way to teach. Teachers presumably have a range of maxims they operate from and in any particular lesson choose the ones which seem most likely to help them create a successful lesson. The teacher's maxims
provide the source for much of the teacher's interactive decisions throughout a lesson.\(^1\) However, teaching maxims as described here differ from Gricean maxims in that teaching maxims are not universals. They do not represent universal principles that underlie effective lessons. Rather, maxims of teaching are the outcomes of teachers' evolving theories of teaching. They are personal working principles which reflect teachers' individual philosophies of teaching, developed from their experience of teaching and learning, their teacher education experiences, and from their own personal beliefs and value systems. Maxims are more specific and practical than the "images" which have been described by researchers such as Clandinin and Johnston. They can be regarded as images that have been transformed into models for practical action.

At the same time, maxims as they are defined here are more than simply principles. A principle is a general rule which one tries to follow. In any lesson, a teacher has a set of material he or she intends to teach. This can be regarded as the curricular agenda for the lesson. Even the worst teacher conducts a lesson with some such agenda in mind and uses working principles to accomplish his or her goals. This can be seen in the following example, taken from a supervisor's report on a teacher's class.

Today I observed what is probably the worst lesson I have ever seen. The setting was a private language school. The teacher was a native-speaker with no training, who had clearly no idea what he was doing. He was substituting at the last minute for a teacher who called in sick. He was teaching a lesson from Streamline, holding the teacher's manual in his hand, reading the instructions, and then issuing instructions to the class. From my conversation with him after the class he revealed that he didn't know what the lesson was about but thought it best just to follow the book. The main concern was simply to cover the material and keep the class occupied till the end of the lesson.

Conversations with the teacher after the lesson revealed that he did not appear to have any other agenda for the lesson. The teacher's approach to his lesson could be said to be based on the principle of survival. Principles which he appeared to be following were such things as "keep the students busy", "don't let on that you are nervous", "follow what the manual says", and so on. Although this lesson was not judged to be successful, teaching can be accomplished at a technically competent level through following the prescriptions or principles laid out in different methodologies. For example the Direct Method (as

\(^1\) Other elements are also obviously involved in teachers' thinking, though are not the focus here. Marland, reporting on a study of teacher interactive thinking, comments:

In addition to principles, other key elements in teacher thinking included perceptions, interpretations, anticipations, reflections, information units, feelings, tactical deliberations, beliefs and rules. Furthermore, the referents in teacher thoughts were aspects of the past, present and future signifying that sometimes thought preceded and directed action (as in anticipation-prospective tactical deliberation sequences) and on other occasions action influenced thought (as in reflections, retrospective tactical deliberations). There were also instances of action sans thought ('impulsivity') and thought sans action('forfeit decisions').

Marland 1987, 504
implemented in the Berlitz Schools), led to the formulation of following principles, which Berlitz teachers had to follow:

- Never translate: demonstrate
- Never explain: act
- Never make a speech: ask questions
- Never imitate mistakes: correct
- Never speak with single words: use sentences
- Never speak too much: make students speak much
- Never use the book: use your lesson plan
- Never jump around: follow your plan
- Never go too fast: keep the pace of the student
- Never speak too slowly: speak normally
- Never speak too quickly: speak naturally
- Never speak too loudly: speak naturally
- Never be impatient: take it easy

Titone 1968: 100-101

A teacher using the Direct Method, Direct Method Materials, and strictly implementing the Berlitz principles or the principles of any other prescriptivist method, might be able to create a technically competent lesson. But to move beyond this procedural level of teaching, the teacher would need to evolve a personal theory of teaching, one which involves values and higher level goals and to which he or she was personally committed. In other words, the teacher would also need to develop a personal agenda for the lesson in addition to a curricular agenda. It is at this level of engagement in teaching that the concept of maxims becomes meaningful. They become in Yinger's term (1987) "guidelines for effective practice", or transformations of images, metaphors, and ideals, into practical plans for the best course of action.

This distinction between "principles of procedure" and "maxims of good practice" was identified in an important study by Elbaz (1981), which examined the practical knowledge employed by a high school English teacher. Clark and Peterson summarize the findings of Elbaz's study:

According to Elbaz, rules of practice are brief, clearly formulated statements prescribing how to behave in frequently encountered teaching situations. Implementation of a rule of practice is simple matter of recognizing a situation and remembering the rule. In contrast a principle of practice is a more general construct than a rule of practice, derived from personal experience, and embodying purpose in a deliberate and reflective way, which can be drawn upon to guide a teacher's actions and explain the reasons for those actions. The use of a principle of practice depends largely on teacher reflection. Thirdly, images are personally held mental pictures of how good teaching should look and feel, expressed by the teacher in terms of brief metaphoric statements or analogies. According to Elbaz, teachers work intuitively rather than analytically to realize their images of good teaching.

Clark and Peterson 1986: 290
The notion of teaching maxims hence focuses an important dimension of teacher knowledge. At one level, becoming a teacher involves learning how to teach. This minimally involves acquisition of pedagogical content knowledge, pedagogical reasoning skills, as well as instructional skills. Pedagogical content knowledge consists of "knowledge that is specific to teaching particular subject matter" (Shulman, 1987, p.7).

It includes one's conceptions of purposes for teaching subject matter and knowledge of students' understanding, curriculum, and instructional strategies.

Clift, 1991, 358

Pedagogical reasoning skills involve the transformation of content knowledge into suitable representations for learning.

Successful teachers cannot simply have an intuitive or personal understanding of a particular concept, principle, or theory. Rather, in order to foster understanding, they must themselves understand ways of representing the concept for students. They must have knowledge of the ways of transforming the content for the purposes of teaching. In Dewey's terms, they must 'psychologize' the subject matter. In order to transform or psychologize the subject matter, teachers must have a knowledge of the subject matter that includes a personal understanding of the content as well as knowledge of ways to communicate that understanding, to foster the development of subject matter knowledge in the minds of students.

Wilson, Shulman and Richert, 1987, 110

Instructional skills refer to teaching strategies, methods, and techniques which provide the basis for how the teacher manages and conducts his or her class. In Shulman's terms:

It includes many of the most crucial aspects of pedagogy; organizing and managing the classroom; presenting clear explanations and vivid descriptions; assigning and checking work; and interacting effectively with students through questions and probes, answers and reactions, and praise and criticism. It thus includes management, explanation, discussion, and all the observable features of effective direct and heuristic instruction already well-documented in the research literature on effective teaching.

Shulman 1987, 17

But at another level teaching involves far more than pedagogical content knowledge, pedagogical reasoning skills, and instructional skills. Without them, one cannot teach, but teaching just at this level is only a first step. To move to the next level in teaching involves
the development of a personal theory of teaching, one containing a coherent set of beliefs, values and principles that provide an orientation to teaching and a framework for practice. Shulman refers to this as the 'wisdom of practice'.

The final source of the knowledge base is the least codified of all. It is the wisdom of practice itself, the maxims that guide (or provide reflective rationalization for) the practice of able teachers.

Shulman 1987, p.11

7 Implications for teacher education

The view of teaching presented here offers a perspective on teacher development which has some useful implications for teacher education. The focus on teachers' subjective accounts of the principles underlying effective teaching offers an interesting perspective on what teaching is and how teachers acquire the capacity to teach. If teachers are guided in their teaching as much by personal maxims as by general instructional considerations, the nature, status and use of such maxims clearly deserves recognition in teacher education programs.

Personal maxims or principles might provide a useful perspective for student teachers to examine in the course of their professional preparation, as they explore both their own thinking-in-action as well as that of other teachers. The making explicit of beliefs, principles and values should be an ongoing focus of teacher development programs, since as Clandinin and others have demonstrated, teachers' images and perspectives often have a powerful and lasting influence on teachers' thinking and practice, and often create resistance to alternative modes of thought and action. And since maxims have a moral dimension, reflecting the teacher's view of the right and best way to teach, they can bring the student teacher into conflict with supervisors, peers and other teachers who do not share the same principles. Zeichner, Tabahnick and Densmore report:

First, our data clearly indicate that student teaching did not result in a homogenization of teacher perspectives. Students came into the experience with different teaching perspectives, and significant differences among students remained at the end of the semester. Our analyses of interviews and observations with students, and of interviews with co-operating teachers and university supervisors, overwhelmingly indicate that student teaching did not significantly alter the substance of the teaching perspectives that the 13 students brought to the experience. On the contrary, with the exception of three students, teaching perspectives solidified but did not change fundamentally over the course of the 15-week semester. For the most part, students became more articulate in expressing, and more skillful in implementing, the perspectives that they possessed in less developed forms at the beginning of the experience.

1987, 36

Identifying the maxims which teachers and student teachers use to guide their teaching can be achieved in a variety of ways, including narratives, journal writing,
discussion and other forms of critical reflection. Once the role of maxims is acknowledged it is not difficult to describe them, though as we have seen from the examples discussed above, some are more easily articulated than others. Once identified however, maxims can serve as one source of information that can help teachers interpret and evaluate their own teaching, as well as the teaching of others. In practice teaching for example, teachers can articulate the maxims they hope to draw on during a lesson. Following the lesson they can then review the lesson to see the extent to which they were able to implement their maxims, or whether others would have been more appropriate.

However, as with images of teaching, it is not the case that teacher's maxims should go unchallenged (see Johnston 1992; Calderhead and Robson, 1991). A supervisor may conclude that a teacher is teaching with the wrong maxims, for example, or that a maxim is being overused to the detriment of student learning. While a supervisor may not agree that the maxims a teacher follows represent an appropriate way of teaching, however, recognizing them and examining their role in shaping thoughts and actions can be a useful step in facilitating the student teacher's future professional growth.

References


Johnston, Sue. 1992. *Images; a way of understanding the practical knowledge of student teachers*. Teaching and Teacher Education. 18,2 pp 128-136.


